

# HINESBURG PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION MEETING MINUTES

December 13, 2006

**Attendees (22):** Karla Munson (meeting organizer), Krista Chadwick (VTrans), Laura Murphy (Champlain Valley Agency on Aging), Peter Keating (CCMPO), Julie Witherell (CCTA), Meridith Birkett (CCTA), Jeanne Wilson (Town Administrator), Judy Murphy (American Cancer Society), Bill Neil (United Church), Peggy Cioffi (St. Jude Church), Ken Martin (CCSU), Jim Moulton (ACTR), Eric Bayda (Saputo), Carrie Fenn (Planning Commission), David Fenn, Anna Grady (NRG Systems), Jerry Wetzel (St. Jude Church), Kim Salzmann (ROVER), Kristy Stillwell (ROVER), Shelly McSwenney (Lund Family Center), Daryl Benoit (CCMPO), Alex Weinhagen (Town Planner).

The meeting began at approximately 10am.

Karla welcomed everyone and explained the rationale for this brainstorming meeting on transit and transportation options for Hinesburg. She explained that the Hinesburg community has expressed the desire for additional transportation options through the Town planning process and via a variety of community forums (e.g., 2005 Community Visit program). She said this was further elucidated by a recent mail survey that she sent to Hinesburg residents on behalf of the town's Village Steering Committee. Although the survey had a relatively low response rate (approx. 40 responses), it still indicated the varied transportation needs in the community from workday commuters to residents without access to a car to disabled residents with special transit needs. Karla noted that she had observed a variety of transit providers passing through Hinesburg (Addison County buses, SSTA buses, etc.), and wondered if those options could be used more fully to address Hinesburg's transit needs. She also noted that after researching the options and providers, she realized that most residents probably have no idea how to access all the existing services that are available – some probably don't know these existing options are out there at all.

Krista described the programs funded or supported by VTrans (VT Agency of Transportation). Some of these include: commuter routes, rideshare programs, vanpool programs, fixed route transit providers (e.g., CCTA), on-demand transit providers (e.g., SSTA), volunteer driver programs. She clarified that VTrans doesn't actually provide these transit services directly, rather, it provides funding and permitting oversight to transit organizations across the state that actually provide the services. She noted that currently there is no centrally coordinated volunteer driver program in Chittenden County, but that VTrans is working with SSTA (Special Services Transportation Agency) in the hopes of creating one. She also noted that most transportation services have the capability and are permitted to pick up general riders in addition to special or directed route clients, but that in reality this will depend on the type of rider, route, and funding program. Laura said that SSTA in particular has a specific "seat charge" to address general riders.

Peter asked what Hinesburg's needs are – i.e., transportation options within town or outside of town. Karla said Hinesburg has needs on both fronts. Alex agreed, but argued that the greatest need is for transit options taking residents out of town (and back again) to destinations in the greater Burlington metro area (e.g., Williston, Essex, Burlington, South Burlington, Winooski).

Anna said that NRG Systems is very interested in providing options for their employees, potentially some sort of bus to pick up employees at central locations (e.g., park & rides). She said the NRG owners (Jan & David Blittersdorf) feel strongly about this, and are willing to contribute to help make this financially viable. Jim said this was excellent news since employer contributions help serve as local match for various programs. Anna felt we need to move toward a comprehensive mass transit system, and not simply rely on carpool and vanpool solutions. Jim pointed out that customer demand/desire for bus transit is high, but that options aren't widely available yet. Jim said that Vermont currently spends approximately \$40 per person per year of public money on public transportation as a whole (fixed route buses, vanpool, etc.). To put this in perspective, he said that if we spent just \$40 more per person each year, we could double our investment in public transportation.

Meridith said that based on some very rough calculations, it would cost approximately \$140,000 per year for CCTA to provide 2 morning and 2 evening trips to/from Hinesburg. She said that if potential grant money could be secured (not a given), the local match to make this happen would be approximately \$28,000-\$30,000 per year. Jeanne asked if CCTA's local match in other towns comes just from the municipality or also from employers. Meridith and Julie said that it comes from both, and gave examples of how certain routes receive funding assistance from merchants and businesses (U-Mall, IBM, major retailers, etc.).

Kim asked what the SSTA seat charge is for general ridership. Laura said that it depends on the route being run as well as other factors such as who is paying bill (e.g., Medicare), but that in Charlotte it is about \$40 and in Williston it is about \$12. Kristy mentioned the agency in the islands that provides comprehensive services, called CIDER – Champlain Islanders Developing Essential Resources. She said this group coordinates and provides transit options, including organizing a volunteer driver program. Shelly said that the Lund Family Center provides quite a lot of transportation for the families in need and at risk in Hinesburg. She said much of this transportation is done in staff vehicles providing a lift to appointments, doctor visits, etc.

A number of people noted that buses traveling in or through Hinesburg often appear to be largely empty. Laura explained that so many buses are nearly empty because of the rural nature and population of the area as well as the nature of demand side service that focuses on individual needs for particular destinations, times, etc. She said that with such a rural population, there is little overlap in people's need for particular destinations and times. Jim explained that the Addison County buses that ran through Hinesburg, over the last year or so, were running 6 days a week to provide people with access to the hospital for dialysis treatment. He said that many of these riders have died; therefore, there are currently zero trips through Hinesburg.

Karla summarized the 3 basic transportation needs: 1) work/commuter, 2) in-town options, 3) irregular/occasional point to point travel. Jim said that we need a system that is reliable, predictable, and flexible in order to assure folks they can survive without a car. Daryl suggested implementing a fixed route system via a provider like CCTA along with a locally coordinated system to get folks to the fixed route stops. Krista said a local component (e.g., locally operated or via SSTA) would be required in order to assure access to the fixed route stops to ensure access by folks with disabilities (ADA requirements). There was a discussion about the various technical requirements on this front. David felt it was important to have a fixed route system in order to maximize the economy of scale. He said perhaps it could serve Bristol as well as way to spread the financial burden. He felt that there were many local options to help folks get to the

fixed route stops. Jim noted that the Bristol Selectboard did recently express some interest in having transit service up the Route 116 corridor.

Jeanne asked Ken if the CCSU school buses could be utilized to provide additional transit options. Ken noted that safety concerns had been raised in the past regarding having adults and school children riding on the same bus. Various people noted that in Burlington, many school children use the CCTA public buses as their “school bus”, and it appears to work. Ken suggested a possibility on “dead head” runs that CCSU provides to students heading to the Essex and Burlington Vocational/Technical centers. He said it might be possible to dovetail these routes with general ridership. He said there wasn’t much flexibility in the morning route (8:45am and 9:30am), but there is some flexibility in the afternoon routes.

Peggy said that St. Jude church has a 1-year old transit committee that is exploring ways to get their parishioners to various appointments, doctor visits, etc. She said some simply lack vehicles, and many in need are elderly or disabled and need someone to drive them. Judy said the American Cancer Society has a phone number to call to arrange for volunteer drivers to help get cancer patients to treatments, doctor appointments, etc. Laura said the agency for the blind and visually disabled also provides a similar volunteer driver service. Shelly said Medicaid provides payment for taxi-cab service for some doctor visits for eligible families that the Lund Family Center works with. She said this taxi-cab service is very inefficient for rural areas, and the Medicaid cost could be reallocated to more efficient transportation options.

Karla said that Hinesburg’s location on the periphery of Chittenden County makes many transportation options difficult, which is why she feels it is important to coordinate with Addison County services that may pass through Hinesburg. David felt Hinesburg needs a centralized referral/coordination service or entity. Kim asked Jim what Addison County Transit Resources (ACTR) services include. Jim said ACTR has 12 buses (all lift equipped) and coordinates approximately 30 volunteer drivers.

Bill said the United Church is willing to consider a park and ride on church property that is just south of the village on the east side of Silver Street (“Baptist Lot”). Eric said Saputo is interested in addressing their employee transportation, and that the main issue is getting employees to Hinesburg, since carpooling on the way home is generally easier to arrange. He said they have been considering providing their own transportation service (e.g., company vanpool). Julie noted that CCTA has a 12-passenger van leasing program for this sort of purpose that costs about \$250/month; however, they currently only have 4 vans, and all are leased at the moment.

Peter said that in 1999, Hinesburg did ask the CCMPO for help in completing a study on the potential of using school buses for additional public transit. He said this study determined this option would be very difficult, but that more study was warranted. Peter felt the real issue behind any and all options is funding. He said that we’ve got to figure out a way to fund additional transit options without relying on property taxes. Jim agreed that the bigger question is all about funding, and he reiterated that for a mere \$40 per person per year, Vermont could double our investment in public transit.

Karla asked if a central website to direct people to transit options would be a good idea. Daryl suggested checking the Agency of Human Services website, as they have one that may already function this way.

Anna said NRG really does want to help, and thinks we need to keep pushing a progressive vision of comprehensive mass transit, even while we implement stop gap solutions in the short term. She also thanked Karla for bringing together this group. Kristy described the transportation advocacy group called ROVER (Riders of Vermont), which she represents. She noted that Kim is the Chittenden County ROVER coordinator, and that the group is an opportunity for community action as well as legislative initiatives. Everyone agreed that the top issue is funding, and that people need to push their legislators again and again to prioritize funding for public transit.

Judy asked if VTrans has a long range vision to truly change the nature of Vermont's transportation system. Krista said that VTrans does have a long range transportation plan, but that implementation is entirely dependent on available resources, and that it is difficult to affect change with the current level of resources/funding.

The meeting adjourned at approximately Noon.

Respectfully Submitted,

Alex Weinhagen, Director of Planning & Zoning