

PUBLIC FORUM  
HANDOUT  
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**COMMENTS BEFORE THE BURLINGTON CITY COUNCIL JUNE 3, 2013  
REGARDING BURLINGTON PlanBTV**

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Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Final Draft of the PlanBTV aimed at guiding the development of the Burlington downtown and waterfront areas. This more than year-long process represents my first participation in policy development as a Burlington citizen.

The comments here relate primarily to the transportation sections of which contain serious shortcomings and some clearly misleading. Most important the transportation elements fail in the mission of any—providing a rational guide to the downtown and waterfront development. Most of my comments relate to the inadequate walking and bicycling content.

My suggestion is that instead of adopting the Plan BTV as is, that at least the Transportation section, particularly the walking and bicycling material, be re-worked with the cooperation and participation of the Burlington Walk Bike Council (BWBC). I am sure you would be surprised as councilors to learn that neither the Steering Committee nor the full BWBC meetings (two total monthly included a minute of discussion regarding the PlanBTV materials much less even receiving at any time the three or four pages of draft and then revised PlanBTV material on walking and bicycling. As a Steering Committee member, perhaps you can understand my submission of these comments following reviewing the draft document in the last few days.

Let me emphasize the fact of rapid change in the marketplace in all modal travel—bus, rail, auto, walking and bicycling. For example, already the statistic from a year ago of 62% of traveling to work by car in Burlington drops to 54% in the latest Census information—car travel to work surely will continue to move downward and drop below 50% in the near future. All major roadways accessing the downtown and Marketplace in Burlington show substantial and continuing decreases in numbers since peaking about 1990. Traffic numbers decline on major streets—Main, Pearl, the Northern Connector, Shelburne, Pine and Northern Avenue—range from 8 to 28 (Pine Street) percent over the past two decades.

As representatives a ward, one way to think of change is to consider home to work trips each year since 2000--about ten of your constituents switch from car travel to work to another mode every year—bus, walk, bicycle or work at home. In Vermont car travel to work dropped 3% in the last decade with an estimated 9,000 workers during the period choosing something other than car travel—and the number of car travelers at the end of the decade unchanged from 2000.

But the PlanBTV language concludes: “Shoppers and visitors coming to downtown from afar will likely continue to get here by car.” Basically we need to recognize that shoppers and visitors increasingly will come by modes other than the car. Extension of Amtrak service to Union Station is less than three years away, seasonally the Champlain Ferry brings thousands to the waterfront, and commuter rail and even light rail from the waterfront via the Marketplace to UVM and Fletcher Allen Health Care are very likely within a few years. Finally, PlanBTV cites “convenience” as key to choice of travel—I would suggest that those who quit their cars in droves for the CCTA Link service to Montpelier recognize the up to \$7,000 annual after tax saving in their household budget—and that saving is after paying the daily \$8 roundtrip daily fare. Simply, just about any ground mode of transportation is less costly than the private auto.

Note extensive comments I made orally and in written form earlier in this process were almost entirely excluded in any subsequent plan drafts.

Before specific objections

Here are some other specific comments:

1. In the section “crossing to the other side”: This section fails to mention the only proven method of moving walkers through intersections quickly, safely and comfortably—the modern roundabout. For some reason City and Regional planners totally fail to recognize the pre-eminence that the Federal Highway Administration places on the use of roundabouts for walker and all other modes safety—or the fact that three states and two Canadian provinces now make the roundabout the default choice for intersections. Note to date not a single walker fatal has occurred in almost 15,000 roundabout years in the U.S. and Canada.
2. In the section “1. Bikeways”: This section claims, falsely: “Recent studies have shown the dedicated bike lane can reduce injury for bikers by 90%.” I must say that this can only be described as untrue based on research and even advisories of the organization sponsored by U.S. DOT note this, [Bicyclinginfo.org](http://www.bicyclinginfo.org) (<http://www.bicyclinginfo.org/faqs/answer.cfm?id=971> )

Key here is that a bicycle lane and a protected bicycle lane or cycle track are two totally different treatments—lanes are not particularly safe and cannot be used by all ages or those of all skill levels. Cycle tracks when connected to proper intersection treatments provide both mobility and safety for all bicyclists. (my blog posting over the weekend center on this very subject ( see [TonyRVT.blospot.com](http://TonyRVT.blospot.com) )

Basic bike lanes do not necessarily result in increased safety and certainly do not serve all users (I avoid them except during low traffic periods). Protected bike lanes, also called cycle track—which I endorse—still have yet to be completely accepted by all elements of the bicycle community. My blog addresses this overall issue and how truly “complete streets” means cycle track along segments and roundabouts with bicycle pathing at intersections presents the best infrastructure affording mobility and safety for users of all ages and skills.

3. In the section “2 Intersection treatments”: This section does not mention roundabouts and the importance of separate bicycle pathways at a roundabout or other types of bicycling treatment where separate bicycle and walker pathways cannot be provided. With the new Shelburne Street roundabout coming on line in a year or so, this is not an academic concern. (Note with a few exceptions most of Burlington arterial streets can be served by single lane roundabouts which do [see Netherlands 1994 research by Schoon and van Minnen] reduce walker injuries by about 90% and bicycle injuries by 60% or more).

4. In section “Bike Culture”: A general comment here. Bicycling and walking in the United States experience crash rates are several times higher than in the Netherlands and Germany per mile of travel (John Pucher and Lewis Dijkstra). We need in Burlington substantial—tens of millions—in investments in walking and bicycling infrastructure (mostly cycle track/separate bicycle pathways and roundabouts) as a pre-condition to encouraging and achieving high levels of walking and, particularly, bicycling. We need to be careful not to put the cart before the horse.

5. In the section “Cycle track”: Again, the claim cycle track reduces bicycle injuries “90%” does not find confirmation in research. Indicator research—cycle track versus riding on normal roadway—done in Montreal found significant decrease in injuries but statistically complete research remains to be done. I strongly support cycle track as the basic infrastructure to provide a safe level for bicycling for all users—but am not ready to quantify in the absence of data the reduction attained over lanes/no lanes. My current position is that only protected bicycle lanes, cycle track, need be installed and where possible matched with roundabout treatments at intersections.

6. In the section “Transit ties it altogether”: This section needs to be totally redone since, as a practical matter, car traffic entering declines—and this includes vacation and visitor travel. Transit includes the Amtrak service set for 2017. Transit includes high capacity commuter rail service which can literally deliver thousands of visitors and hour to the waterfront. Transit includes high capacity light rail which along with commuter rail was studied extensively in Burlington in the 1990s—those plans need to be re-examined and referenced in PlanBTV. The transit section (including Champlain Ferry as an integral part) really keys the future success of both the waterfront and the Marketplace. Transit and the promise it provides for low cost access carrying visitors in large numbers needs to key the entire aspect of bringing folks to and from the future development of the waterfront

One last comment. PlanBTV fails to acknowledge the Marketplace “plaza” as one of three in the nation and its intersections a rare U.S. example of “shared space” where modes mix at the highest level of safety at the Cherry, Bank and College intersections—shared space which needs to be expanded outward where helpful to retail businesses and replicated in other spots in the community—and probably at spots within the waterfront development.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on PlanBTV.

GIVE TWO CENTS (GAS TAX EQUIVALENT) FOR BURLINGTON-MONTPELIER AND BURLINGTON-ST. ALBANS COMMUTER RAIL? AND A PENNY MORE (GAS TAX EQUIVALENT) TO ADD BURLINGTON-MIDDLEBURY TOO?



Stadler GTW DMU Low Floor in Commuter Rail Service by Denton County Transportation Authority, Austin, TX

## **An Action Outline for New Vermont Commuter Rail Passenger Service along Three Rail Corridors out of Burlington, Vermont**

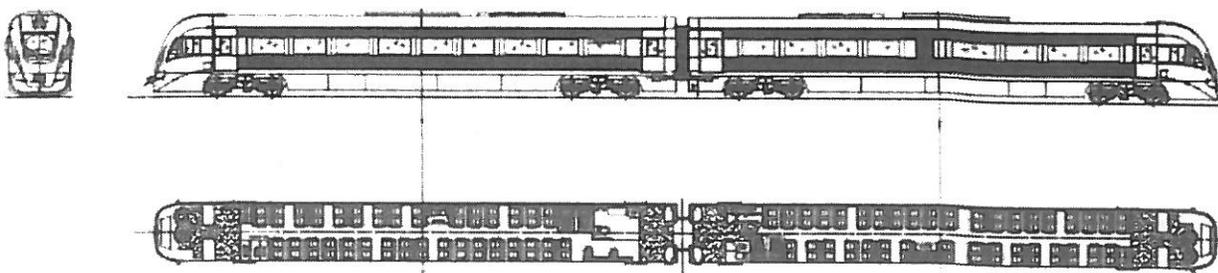
**Phase 1: Chittenden County-Washington County Commuter Rail Service (CW Commuter Rail); Phase 2: Chittenden County-Franklin County Commuter Rail Service via IBM Technology Park (CF Commuter Rail); and Phase 3: Addison County-Chittenden County Commuter Rail Service (AC Commuter Rail) and Montpelier-Barre Extension**

**REPORT SUMMARY:** This action outline calls for funding for the federal applications and necessary studies to start Vermont Commuter Rail Service Phase 1: the 54 mile Chittenden County-Washington County (CW Commuter Rail) from Charlotte to Burlington to Montpelier State House. Phases 2 and 3 expand service to Franklin and Addison Counties. With a gas tax raising \$3.3 million yearly, Phase 1 and 2 support—capital and operating—costs under two cents, \$6.5 million.

Commuter rail service economically benefits directly both Vermont employers and workers. Commuter rail service follows: (1) recent upgrading the majority of Phase 1 route to 80-mph passenger speeds; (2) the decade surge from 0 to 50 Link workday commuter buses, now nearing 500 commuters between Burlington and Montpelier, St. Albans and Middlebury; and (3) Champlain Flyer commuter rail service 2000-2002 with track and stations still service ready between Charlotte and Burlington. The massive shift in Vermont and nationally away from cars with a parallel

increased public transportation use--a true "transportation tectonic shift"-- continues. U.S. under-age-30 driver licensing dropped 10% 1995-2010, and car travel for all age groups declines. Vermont added over 9,000 workers 2000-2010 while during that time car commuters actually dropped, and in Burlington solo driving by the 10,000 workers at three institutions fell 14%.

The CW Commuter Rail Service base passenger estimate, 1,110 commuters every workday via ten stations, compares to about 240 Montpelier Link commuters currently via three stations. CW Commuter Rail estimated 555,000 base year trips compares to about 100,000 Vermont Amtrak stations boardings. Reflecting changed commuting world today, a 1999 study predicted four daily rail commuters Montpelier to Burlington—but this year Montpelier workday Link commuters to Burlington reaches almost 130. A commuter saves up to \$7,000 after tax yearly for this 40-mile commute by Link or a CW Commuter Rail trip versus the solo drive.



Bombardier Vlocity 160 DMU configuration (136 passengers seating)

Calling Vermont a "rural" state ignores three major interstate highways, two growing Amtrak routes, and a major tourist industry with a first place in eastern skier-days. Vermont's tourist economy future depends on maintaining rural character and serving visitors through connections by sustainable transportation, a task only a rail passenger network accomplishes. Commuter rail naturally evolves to such a network. No transportation investment better fulfills Vermont's premier land use goal: "compact village and urban centers surrounded by rural countryside."

CW Commuter Rail scheduling in each direction includes three a.m. and p.m. peak trains and one mid-day (14 trains total). The equipment, two-unit self-propelled railcars (DMUs), handles 150-175 passengers. New stations include IBM Technology Park, St. Michaels/Fanny Allen, Burlington PARC, and South Burlington plus town center stations in Winooski, Richmond, Bolton, and Montpelier.

Vermont's two Amtrak trains cost \$7 million each year, more than CW and CF Commuter Rail support total. Comparatively, with 80% federal match from regular federal transportation funds received each year, CW Commuter Rail base year costs totals \$0.88 million State dollars (a quarter cent gas tax equivalent) for all capital and operating. Costs for base year CW Commuter Rail: passenger revenue \$2.6 million; \$7.0 million operating and capital; and \$4.4 million support with support shared 20%, \$0.88 million Vermont share, and 80%, \$3.5 million federal share.

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