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*Agency of Transportation*

December 3, 2019

Mayor Miro Weinberger  
City Hall  
49 Church Street  
Burlington, VT 05401

Dear Mayor Weinberger,

Thank you for your recent correspondence regarding our coordinated efforts to bring Amtrak train service to Burlington. We are excited by the enthusiasm you expressed in your letter and your commitment to working with VTrans to return train service to the Queen City, while respecting and protecting the values of the City and its residents.

On Tuesday, November 19<sup>th</sup>, Michele Boomhower and Dan Delabruere of my staff had the opportunity to meet with the Transportation, Utilities and Energy Committee (TUEC) of the City Council to discuss the project and provide information, including information regarding a new potential overnight storage site which the Agency identified adjacent to the McNeil generating plant. At that meeting, Michele and Dan outlined very preliminary information regarding the McNeil site, since that time the Agency has worked with the CCRPC and consulting firm VHB, to prepare an Addendum (attached) to the *Burlington Amtrak Train Servicing and Storage Facility Assessment* which augments the original Assessment to include an evaluation of the McNeil location utilizing the same criteria as were applied to the original 5 locations.

Additionally, Michele and Dan committed to the TUEC to provide the following enhanced communications related to the project to assure that anyone interested in the project has access to up to date, direct, information:

- VTrans will develop a project website to provide up to date information
- VTrans will issue quarterly project updates through an email distribution link which will be built into the project website
- VTrans and City Staff will continue to meet on a monthly basis to coordinate the Amtrak project and the Greenway project
- At the invitation of the City Transportation, Utilities & Energy Committee, or any other bodies of City Government, the Agency will provide biannual updates on the project.

In response to the questions you posed in our recent correspondence, we offer the following responses:

1. The reasons for which the Amtrak cannot be accommodated in the Railyard. Vermont Rail System (VRS) and VTrans have stated that the existing Railyard is not an option for overnighting the Amtrak train, and the City needs a better understanding of why this is the case.

On November 25<sup>th</sup> I received the attached letter from VRS regarding the Amtrak Servicing and Storage Study. Information regarding the challenges and obstacles of train storage in the railyard are outlined in that letter.

2. The feasibility of overnighting and servicing the train in Saint Albans or another location beyond Burlington. If the State believes this option infeasible, the City needs more information about why this is the case.

During the last Rail Advisory Council meeting there was a vote taken to request that VTrans explore the option of having the Amtrak service extend further north of Burlington. As background, staff have been working with New England Central Railroad (NECR) and VRS over the past few years to plan for the detour of VRS train traffic over the NECR railroad during the track closure in Middlebury as part of the Middlebury Tunnel Project; this detour is expect to occur during the 2020 construction season.

To prepare for this detour “studies” were completed to determine the required improvements to the line between College Street, Burlington and the wye in Essex Junction to allow for the additional freight trains which will travel over this segment of track. The list of improvements needed for the safe movement of freight will be implemented in advance of the detour so the increased volume and weight of freight trains, traveling at low speeds, can utilize the line during the limited time closure of the track segments in Middlebury. At this time, there have been no comprehensive studies completed to evaluate the level of improvements needed to operate passenger service between Burlington and Essex Junction. A comprehensive study would be required.

Under the VTrans Grant Agreement with the FRA, the Agency is required to commence Amtrak service to Burlington service by 2021, all focus has centralized on the planning, permitting and construction of this service. In this advanced stage of delivering Amtrak service to Burlington, a change to the destination of the train beyond Burlington, even if it were feasible, would put at risk the commencement of service from Rutland to Burlington on the current timeline.

The 2015 State Rail Plan does express, as a second-tier priority after Amtrak passenger service to Burlington and Montreal, Amtrak service from Burlington to Essex Junction (see excerpt from the Rail Plan below).

**ES.1.4.4. Vermont Passenger Rail Priorities**

VTrans has established extending the **Ethan Allen Express** to Burlington and the **Vermont** to Montreal as first priorities. Second priority is to establish the service between Albany and Burlington through North Bennington and Manchester, and further extending the **Ethan Allen Express** from Burlington to Essex Junction. Third priority is to upgrade all passenger routes to FRA Track Class 4 and to add another frequency to the **Vermont** service. Exhibit ES-5 maps VTrans priorities.

In order to understand the implications of extending service from Burlington to Essex Junction, and then potentially on to Saint Albans, VTrans would need to undertake a comprehensive analysis. Such an analysis would likely cost between \$200,000-\$400,000 and take 12-18 months to complete. At this time the Agency has not scheduled nor budgeted for such an analysis due to the fact that we are still in the process of focusing on the top priorities in the Rail Plan, returning passenger service to Burlington and Montreal.

Some of the questions which would need to be contemplated in such a future study include:

- Should the train go to Essex or St. Albans if it goes beyond Burlington?
- What capital expenses would be needed from the currently planned end of the service to any new termination point?
- What are the costs with an expansion in the route?
- Is there interest on the owners and operators of the tracks to allow an additional passenger train to operate on the track and if they do will this trigger the need for PTC? If it does, who is responsible for the installation, maintenance and operating costs of this?
- Could it meet the Amtrak Vermont with schedule changes?
- What impact would these schedule changes have on current services?
- If an extension of the service is feasible what does the operating schedule look like?
- What is potential ridership with an expansion in the route?
- Would our partner states support this change? If so what does the cost and revenue splits look like? Would train crews' time out" with an extension in distance for their routes, thus requiring an additional crew to complete the trip?
- What conflicts if any does this pose for other uses on the various tracks involved?

Amtrak to Burlington is the State's goal. This will remain our focus as we work with our partners to make this happen. Any additional services beyond Burlington can be discussed and proceed through a planning process in the future, however this must be done separate from the critical path we are on currently to bring service to Burlington.

Discussions with NECR have been positive, but rightfully so they would like VTrans to have a defined plan to present to them (a business plan) for consideration and response. This plan needs to define specifics of the service (times, stops, etc.), so they can evaluate the impact on their infrastructure and operations. NECR will need enough detail to decide what infrastructure improvements would need to be implemented by VTrans, costs that would be associated with this, as well as operating and maintenance costs that would be VTrans' responsibility if NECR granted permission for a future additional Amtrak service. Additionally, the State would need to identify a source of funding.

3. Why a second track is needed between King and College Streets to accommodate the Amtrak train, an understanding of what alternative strategies have been considered, and if there are additional actions that could make such an alternative feasible. The City is specifically interested in understanding why a second track is necessary at this time if Union Station is not selected as the overnighting location and thus Amtrak would only be briefly stopping at Union Station two times a day.

While Amtrak enjoys a federal delegation allowing it to pass upon any rail operator's tracks, there must be an agreement in place with the railroad which hosts the Amtrak train, and that agreement is predicated on the "Host Railroad" being provided accommodation to maintain its current and future services. Vermont Rail System (VRS), which will serve as the "Host Railroad" for the Amtrak Service, requires the second track to maintain its freight rail operations and its passenger train service (see attached letter from VRS regarding these details).

One of the most significant operational obstacles faced by VRS as the host of the Amtrak service is the limitations which are created during the time which Amtrak is traveling on the track between the wye in Rutland and the end of the VRS controlled line at College Street in Burlington. For each segment of track a train is operating on, a "track warrant" must be obtained from the dispatch center to assure that there are no other trains on the line. It is expected that the "track warrant segment" agreed to by Amtrak and the Federal Railroad Administration would be the entire segment from Rutland to College Street, Burlington – which would then require that no other trains be operating on the line, including in and out of the railyard in Burlington. VTrans is working with Amtrak to seek an FRA exemption which would reduce the warrant segment to Rutland to Middlebury and Middlebury to Burlington so there would be less disruption on VRS operations.

The track warrant segment, even if reduced to Middlebury to Burlington, would interrupt all VRS rail operations during the time the Amtrak train is on the primary track. VRS has predicated the second track as necessary, regardless of where the Amtrak train is stored overnight, due to operational interruptions outlined above, which would be compounded if the evening Amtrak service were not on time.

4. The CCRPC report finds that “nitrogen dioxide emissions from the locomotive have the potential to approach or exceed the NAAQS under the 1-hour averaging period” because the balconies of the Wing Building residences will be less than 50 feet from the train. Does the State believe that this is a concern that will require mitigation, and if so, what are the estimated mitigation costs? Additionally, would mitigation be necessary only if the Amtrak overnighted at Union Station or are the air quality concerns still exist regardless of the overnighting location?

VTrans is committed to mitigating air quality standard exceedances, should there be any identified once any necessary field testing is completed at the location chosen for the overnight storage of the train. Such testing could be accomplished in advance of the train service commencing; however, the State will not be scheduling testing until a location for the overnight storage of the train has been identified. Based on the outcome of the testing, the State would undertake an analysis of mitigation measures which could be implemented and determine which measures will be most appropriate to implement if such measures are required. The State would undertake the analysis and design, if needed, in consultation with the City.

In terms of actual idling of the train when arriving at the station to disembark riders is 5-10 minutes, including completing full shut down of the engines. Departure start up and idling is the same amount of time, 5-10 minutes, except during cold winter temperatures when the engine fluids need to be brought up to temperature and brake check completed, this can cause the engines to need to idle 20-30 minutes.

5. Some constituents have expressed concern the construction of a second rail in front of Union Station will lead to additional train building and freight storage in the heart of the waterfront. Does the State believe a significant increase in such activities is likely? As the owner of the rail line in front of Union Station, can the State ensure that this will not happen?

Based on statements which have been made by VRS officials, the State does not believe that there will be a significant increase in the building or freight storage of trains on the additional track. The State leases the railroad right of way to VRS, under its lease, VRS is within its rights to undertake any railroad operations, or construction of improvements, it deems necessary for its business purposes; the State has no authority to control, direct, or prohibit such uses or improvements.

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I look forward to our continued collaboration on the advancement of this project. Please feel free to contact me at any time if you have questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



Joe Flynn  
Secretary of Transportation

Cc: Michele Boomhower, Director of Policy, Planning and Intermodal Development  
Dan Delabruere, Bureau Director, Rail and Aviation