

To: LWVVT Transportation Study Group

From: Claudette Sortino

Topic: Plans For Higher Speed Rail in the Upper Valley
A discussion held at the Montshire Museum on 5/4/10
Sponsored by LWV of the Upper Valley

Here are the notes I took at this meeting. It was very interesting and well attended. Barbara McIlroy of LWVUV moderated the event.

Freight trains use only 29% of the fuel that trucks use and produce only 23% of the greenhouse gases. In the United States, 20% of greenhouse gases come from transportation. In Vermont that number is 42%. This is a direct result of the rural nature of the state, with less public transportation and longer trips for most things. In NYC more than half of residents don't own a vehicle. In VT, life would be almost impossible without one.

In 2008, the government (state & federal) spent 135 billion dollars on highways and 11 billion on railroads. In the US, 86% of travel is by car.

People choose their means of transportation by four factors: price, speed, frequency, and quality of the experience. At present, the price of rail travel is good as is the quality of the experience, but speed and frequency are very poor.

Increase the speed of a train and the cost of operating decreases. A major investment must be made in track. It costs \$1,000,000 to rebuild one mile of track. It costs \$10,000,000 to build a mile of new track. It costs anywhere from two to ten million dollars to build each lane of new highway. If the highway has three lanes in each direction it costs from twelve to sixty million dollars per mile. (The higher costs reflect the location where the highway is built).

Freight pays the bill for the railways.

There are funds presently available from the Recovery Act that will upgrade parts of the Vermonter train service and shorten the time to NYC by somewhere between an hour and an hour and a half. Much of that work will be done in Massachusetts and Connecticut.

New Hampshire has a long term program to operate high speed (110 miles per hour) rail service from Boston to Montreal. The entire 489 mile trip would take four and one-half hours. Phase One will run from Boston to Concord NH and be up and running in 2014. From Boston to Nashua would take 50 minutes, to Manchester 75 minutes, and to Concord 90 minutes. Phase Two would go to Lebanon, Phase Three to Burlington, and Phase Four to Montreal. There are no projected completion times on these last three phases. If the entire project came to fruition the economic benefits after completion would consist of two billion dollars in new businesses and 19,150 new jobs along the rail corridor.

Vermont has 750 miles of railroad track, 600 which are active. Three hundred miles are owned by the government and 300 are in private hands.

When the 8 billion dollar portion of Recovery Act funds were designated to high speed rail development, the federal government received 259 applications for the money. Seventy-nine applications were approved and Vermont received one of these.

Representatives of Congressmen Hodes and Welch told the audience that these Congressmen were working hard to get federal funds for the New England rail corridor. Both the trucking and automobile industries are opposed to more transportation money going to support railroad development. It would help if the public really got after their federal representatives and demanded more attention be given to railroads.

Border security has become an issue. Right now there are long delays when trains cross the Canadian border. People are forced to leave the train and go through a security process which is lengthy and inconvenient. An audience member suggested that the trains should operate like the airlines in this regard. Passengers on trains that are crossing international boundaries should be processed at the end of their trip with no lengthy delays en route. States along the Canadian border have valuable ties with their northern neighbors and should not be excessively inconvenienced by that fact.