

Upper Valley Intermodal Facility Project Advisory Committee
October 14, 2009
Meeting Notes

Attendance: Christine Walker, Nathan Miller, Dan Dahmen, George Sykes, Aaron Brown, Steve Schneider, Joanna Whitcomb, Dan Brand, Van Chesnut, Holly Brown, Rick Dymont, Ben Swanson (member of public)

Christine Walker announced that Rick Dymont Manager of the Lebanon Airport has interest in the outcomes of this project and asked the Committee to consider adding him to the Committee. After discussion, Joanna motioned to add the Manager to the Committee, and Steve Schneider seconded. Group passed motion.

Joanna Whitcomb suggested that a representative from Norwich should be invited as well as there had been some discussion about a location in Norwich.

Dan Brand motioned that the PAC invite Norwich to participate. Steve seconded. Group approved motion. Christine will contact the Selectboard before the next meeting.

Discussion followed about ensuring that others were aware of the meetings and the process. Christine said that she continues to send information to Congressman Hodes office and Peter Welch's office has been receiving all project information.

Christine reviewed the first public meeting. Public questions tended to focus on project scale and size and to help give some concept of the project is Aaron had added to the website similar projects within the state such as Portsmouth and Concord Trailways in Concord. Nate Miller added that responses were generally positive, with nobody suggesting that the project does not need to happen.

One public comment recommended taking all site suggestions to the Selectboards and City Council for their approval prior to submitting a selection to NHDOT.

George Sykes responded that although he gets feedback from the public, it may not be sufficient input from the city. Whatever town is chosen as a host site will want additional public comment opportunity. Van Chesnut acknowledged the risks involved in going to cities and speaking about the project without specific details; the project needs to go through several screening phases before this step occurs.

Nate agreed that this process could occur after the site shortlist emerges after which more detail will be known.

Christine clarified that the public comment centered on whether a formal town approval process would occur. Steve remarked that this is ultimately a federal project. Dan Brand said that consistency with town plans is part of the screening criteria.

Steve emphasized the need to be able to answer the question, "What role will our community play in this project?"

George asked if this committee or federal regulations will decide the community outreach. He added that local regulations are often stricter than federal counterparts, and federal projects sometimes follow the stricter local regulation (e.g., Lebanon Post Office had sprinklers and an alarm system per local code even though federal building regulations do not require them). We might evaluate if there are special local land use regulations in the possible host communities.

Dan Brand suggested that people will be interested in changes to travel times as well as local community impacts.

Van asked if this will be a state-owned facility, and Nate responded, “Yes.”

It was ultimately decided that once the short list of sites was developed that Christine would reach out to those communities and request to speak to them about where the properties are, what concerns the communities may have, and what issues there may be that the Committee should be aware of.

Christine said another public comment stressed the need to consider bike and ped issues and that it had been addressed within the screening criteria but that the Committee may want to be sensitive to these issues.

Joanna recalled another public comment regarding the carbon footprint of the project and didn't think this was part of the screening criteria. Dan Brand said that many of the variables involved are proxies to the carbon produced (e.g., reduction in VMTs).

Joanna suggested that using Google Maps to provide a “fly-over” view of the possible sites would be helpful. She will send a site to Christine that could be helpful.

Back to the carbon question, Van suggested that the commenter was interested in whether the build or do-nothing scenario would lead to lower emissions. Dan suggested the analysis could touch on this issue.

Holly Brown asked if the Vermont Railways was represented.

Christine remarked that Chuck Bohi from Hartford was present and is part of this Committee, though he may not be part of the Railways. She will inquire about the organization.

Steve asked if other media have generated feedback.

Christine deferred to Aaron during his discussion of public outreach.

Site Suggestions

Nate began presentation on suggested sites. cursory analysis has been done thus far.

1. Interstate 89 – Exit 17 (Lebanon): 17 acres along the southbound ramp. This site would not be walkable. Some rolling terrain exists, but it is mostly workable. This could be

accessed from LaPlant Road or Route 4 but will likely require site improvements. The yield condition at the off-ramp is already presented some problems.

Dan Brand asked how many spaces are planned per acre.

Nate said that we are probably looking at 6-7 acres.

Dan Dahmen said room for expansion is part of the criteria.

Joanna asked if we would develop minimum site size.

Dan Dahmen agreed that would be a good consideration.

Van brought up structured parking, and Nate responded that we can keep an open mind about this possibility, even though DOT is not optimistic about that level of funding (or its ability to maintain the facility).

Dan Dahman remarked that annual maintenance costs are \$2000 per structured space and \$300-350 for outdoor parking.

Van suggested that this might be only one possible site at Exit 17. Exit 17 is an important place to consider.

Steve asked if Northern States Tires is on the list.

Nate remarked that the site is on the other side of the street and could be included in the list.

2. Densmore Brickyard Interstate 80 Exit 18 – Approximately 130 acres over three parcels. This site has potential for a mixed use/transit center development. The main concern is the adequacy of existing infrastructure, because it may require reconnection to Hanover Street. It is easily walkable to Lebanon.

Christine suggested the public might have much to say about this site because it is located near the high school.

Joanna asked where Nate received these site suggestions, and he replied that some came from this committee and others from landowners and the public.

Steve asked if these sites are available.

Both sites mentioned so far are on the market, but the analysis in general hasn't looked at this. (Nate).

Van suggested that this second site is very complex and promising. It could create a new travel corridor between DHMC and Lebanon and reduce traffic along 120 and 10.

George said this property was offered to the city for a middle school. Only 20+ acres or so don't contain wetlands, high ridges, and other problematic features. Some contamination issues also exist because it once hosted a brick factory.

Christine wondered if Brownfields funding may therefore be available.

3. Lebanon Armory Interstate 89 – Exit 18 (#2). This site was suggested years ago when an intermodal facility was first suggested. This 7 acre site offers excellent connectivity. Availability is a concern because its current use is military in nature. The size may not be large enough. It is walkable to Lebanon’s business district and Route 120 employers.

Van said that rail and transit people are enthusiastic about this site. The site is only 7 acres, but those are 7 good acres. Tax impacts would be minimal because the site is already in public use.

Dan Brand suggested that we not lose sight of small abutting lots that could enhance the facility.

Joanna remarked that a car lot lies next door.

4. Bayson Site – Interstate 89 Exit 18 (#3). This site is walkable to major employment centers and residential neighborhoods, but the site is only 4 acres and may not be available.
5. Interstate 89 – Exit 18 (Site #4) – Red Barn/Elks Lodge: Large 60 acres site with excellent connectivity and walkability to Lebanon CBD and Route 120 employers. Availability of the site is in question.
6. Interstate 89 –Exit 20 (Site #1) Lebanon Airport: This is a city-owned tract of land available for development. Access to 89 is problematic. Site is at the end of a mile-long dead end road and would require secondary access. This site provides unique connectivity to air, though it is not easily accessible to pedestrians and cyclists. This site has about 40 acres.

Dan Brand remarked that the site is located next to a runway.

Van suggested that the public might not use this site for a park-and-ride, though transit connections are a possibility. Traffic issues along exit 20 would also be present.

Dan Brand said that competition between the airport and transit to NYC and Boston would also exist.

Rick also said that the site would be limited to a low building and parking space due to visibility requirement of FAA.

7. Interstate 89 – Exit 20 (Site #2) – Westboro Railyard: A *Valley News* editorial recommended this site. It could provide connection to future rail. The site may not provide good access to 89 and may run contrary to long-standing community planning for the site.

Dan Brand questioned the acreage, and Nate said that about 10-12 usable acres exist.

Dan Dahman asked what this structure in general would do to surrounding land values. Christine said that in urban areas, land values increase because of the opportunity to create Transit Oriented Development. In rural areas, the answer is less clear. Dan Brand said it could vary by site, depending on whether it brought it more people and commercial opportunities.

8. White River Junction (Site #1) – Former Saturn Dealership – Site is not large enough to accommodate the facility and provides no room for potential expansion.
9. Other sites submitted for consideration: Interstate 91 Exit 13 in Norwich; existing Lebanon Municipal parking lot (someone suggested upgrades including a grade-separated entrance ramps from NH Route 120 Bridge, connectivity to potentially restored rail service, large-scale parking structure with rooftop garden); Veterans Administration Hospital.

Dan Dahman asked if the suggestions reflect community support, and Nate said that suggestions come from the public as well as developers.

Dan Brand suggested meeting with local planning departments to gain insight about what is happening within communities that may be helpful to know and potential projects underway or sites that could be added to the list.

Joanna suggested the area near Upper Valley Aquatic Center could be added to the list.

Van said that some facility is being planned somewhere near there on Route 5 and then asked about the car dealerships on exit 18.

Christine remarked that when the suggestion was made one of the lots was vacant, because it was no longer vacant; it hadn't been included in the presentation.

Van said that one corporation owns three of the four dealership lots and that we should keep them on the list.

Holly Brown asked what steps are being taken for public outreach which led to the next agenda item.

Public Outreach Update

Aaron Brown provided an overview of the public outreach efforts to date. In addition to the *Valley News* editorial, John Gregg published a front-page story about the project the Friday following the first public meeting. Kit Morgan briefly discussed the project on NHPR's show, *The Exchange*. Christine met with the Lebanon Planning Board and will meet next week with the Hanover Rotary and she and Gabe will be the speakers at the Lebanon Chamber Annual Meeting on the 28th.

Aaron said that Phil Dechert has been contact and is interested in having someone talk to his board soon.

Christine added that she and Gabe appeared on Paul Boucher's community access television show, *Points of Interest*.

Aaron replied that the Boucher show and the video of the first public meeting will be available on the CATV-8 and www.uvtransit.com websites in the near future. A DVD will also be available.

Aaron replied that the Upper Valley TMA has contacted the Selectboards, Conservation Commissions, and Planning Boards in Lebanon, Hanover, Enfield, Hartford, and Norwich. Outreach to municipal and civic groups has gone well, but we may need to do a better job reaching bus rider community.

Aaron concluded with the announcement that John Gregg has expressed interest in doing another *Valley News* article before the second meeting.

Closing

Christine announced that at the next meeting, a suggested consultant will be offered to the committee and more information about sites will be presented. The consultant deadline to respond to the RFP is October 23, the subcommittee will meet on October 30 to determine who to interview and interviews with consultant will be held on Friday November 6. A selected consultant will be recommended to the Committee at their November 13 meeting.

Steve suggested having a standardized slide format for each site.

It was decided that prior to the meeting on the 13th that the presentation that will be given on the 17th regarding sites should be sent to the Committee and that a map indicating roughly where the facility may be located should be added to the website. Lastly, I reminder that permission from landowners should be sought prior to any public presentation of sites occurs unless the site is currently on the market. It was also confirmed that it will be important for the public to understand that these are brainstorming ideas and have not to date been vetted through any process.

The next meeting will be held Friday, November 13th, 2:00 at the Hartford Municipal Building.