

Upper Valley Intermodal Facility  
Project Advisory Committee Meeting Notes  
May 12, 2010

Present: Steve Schneider, Peter Gregory, Christine Walker (uvlsrpc), Paul Boucher, Nate Miller (uvlsrpc), Lynn Bohi, Matt Osborn, Phil Dechert, Nicole Cormen, Gabe Zoerheide (tma), Dan Brand, David Saladino (rsg), Rick Dymont, Joanna Whitcomb, David Palmer, Roberta Berner, Aaron Brown (tma), Brett Kiser (rsg)

(1) Public Comments

A resident of Summer Street said he is concerned about the site, not the type of facility. He asked if all sites were weighted equally. For example, he asked whether the criteria consider if a site was near a neighborhood or school. Dave Saladino responded that they were assessed through the screening criteria and the Carter Country Club, for example, lost points for its proximity to a neighborhood.

(2) Welcome and Introductions

Members of the PAC and public introduced themselves.

(3) Summary of Developments

Christine Walker explained the course of the project and how public feedback has been included. Public comments focusing on the screening criteria have been most helpful. At the City's request, recent meetings with City of Lebanon staff examined the screening criteria. City staff came up with a series of questions, and the project consultants answered those questions. They met a second time to go over the scoring of the five final sites. City staff scored the sites themselves with the help of the consultants. The scores were similar and the rankings identical to what the project consultants found.

A neighborhood forum regarding the Densmore site was held on April 30 and May 1 at the request of public input. The first day of the event had the public provide input and describe issues and concerns. The following morning, project consultants created sketches and concepts based on public feedback. Day two of the forum provided the public with an opportunity to view the concepts that attempted to address the concerns and provide feedback.

The neighborhood forum came up with a design concept that removed the intercity component of the project in order to address concerns. The concept demonstrated how the Hanover Street bridge could accommodate bus, pedestrian, emergency vehicle traffic only – no single occupancy vehicles would impact the neighborhoods on either side of the I-89. The covered bridge walkway could completely segregate pedestrians from the bus and emergency vehicles and replace the current chain link fence walkway. A small parking lot could be created with access off I-89 only and have access to the transfer facility only via a pedestrian walkway. No vehicles would be able to get from the parking lot to the bus transfer location. Lynn Bohi added that CATV is airing a recording of the forum on its station.

Public comments at the forum included: concern over increased traffic, ped-bike safety, proximity to schools, and the regional context (e.g., does it fit into the current scale), and public funding going to a private business.

The Lebanon City Council recently passed a motion to request the RPC and DOT to extend the project and rescope the project and continue to look at other sites around the region. Mayor Georgia Tuttle released a letter requesting the RPC to seek more time for the project.

Christine Walker had spoken with DOT and Congressman. Hodes' office to discuss next steps. While supportive of the idea of continued study – a number of things had to happen from DOT's perspective to continue. The intercity piece needed to continue to be the focus of any study, there would be match associated with any additional funding received that would need to come from the communities and there needed to be support from the City of Lebanon. After reviewing the Mayor's letter there did not appear to be support for the project from the City. DOT said that the original scope needed to be completed as outlined before any further study would be conducted.

#### (4) Next Steps

Steve Schneider asked if everyone understood what has happened thus far– meetings with City staff, the forum, and the city council's actions. Gabe Zoerheide added that the public comments received at the forum were negative. Nicole Cormen asked Christine to elaborate on DOT's reaction to the extension request. Christine said that Kit Morgan at DOT did not see support for moving this project to the next stages. She added that there is a great opportunity to examine regional needs, but the funding for the intermodal project was intended to address specific issues and that the municipalities may want to discuss other funding mechanisms to create a more holistic approach to regional transportation systems, as the scope of this project doesn't appear to meet the needs expressed. Cormen added that on the May 5<sup>th</sup> council meeting she asked for the vote on the additional time. She assisted drafting the aforementioned letter, but the Mayor had final edits. She said cooperation with the City is unlikely if Densmore stays on the table.

Dan Brand asked Christine to clarify that the state will not provide the local match to pair with the remaining funds from the appropriation. \$252,000 is still available at DOT, but it's not clear how to use that, and it would require the communities to provide local match to access it. She reiterated that a project examining a multitude of sites addressing various needs and how that fits into a larger regional transportation plan is beyond the scope of this project.

Peter Gregory commended staff on good analysis and extensive public outreach. He said that the project has examined a regional issue – and has been true to the original scope of finding a site. He added that the letter from the Mayor appeared to only address Lebanon concerns when the scope is to find a site within the region. He said that it is up to DOT to decide what to do with the intermodal, but it's exciting to have so many people involved in transportation issues.

Gabe said that although many comments about the site have been negative, the public has shown clear support for creating more commuting options in the region. He asked Christine if it's possible to use remaining funds for a project to examine multiple sites. Christine said as previously stated that DOT has requested that the scope be completed as outlined. The results will be delivered with a preferred alternative, and all the public feedback and input and suggestions will be part of the report to DOT. The concept of creating smaller scale facilities around the region as part of a transportation network will be relayed as well. To change the intercity piece of the project DOT would have to go back to Federal Transit Administration to change the scope of services.

Dan said he would support Peter's idea of doing more regional assessments of transportation strategies.

Chris Haidari, a member from the public, said that public comments have focused on safety and deterioration of quality of life. The City of Lebanon has had to devote a lot of resources for the benefit of the rest of the Upper Valley. She said that the facility does not add to the beauty, safety, or livability of Lebanon.

Nicole added that the same negative comments would have resulted as long as the site was in a residential neighborhood. She asked if the PAC is prepared to recommend a site that works by the numbers, but is a political fantasy.

Steve said that it will likely submit the best available data and ensure that the public comments and reactions are included.

Lynn Bohi said that she was struck most by the suggestion to put the intermodal on the periphery. She said that this is as much of a tax issue as anything – land outside the town is less expensive and it's preferable to keep more valuable, in-town land on the tax rolls.

A representative of the owner of the Densmore site suggested spending additional time educating the city and public officials about the negative results of a no-build scenario and engaging the public in designing something that will work.

Christine responded that funding was to conduct analysis not marketing.

Gabe asked if there is an alternative to suggesting the Densmore site and providing a caveat – to adjust the contract and spend time to find an agreeable site.

Peter Gregory reiterated that the contract that Gabe is also a party to is being asked by DOT to be completed as originally outlined.

Paul Boucher agreed that the PAC should fulfill its contract and let DOT handle the rest of the project.

Phil Dechert added that he has worked with RSG before, come up with a politically unfavorable plan, and then implemented the plan with great success and made the community happy.

Gabe asked if it's possible to do a public meeting on the second-ranked Hartford site as well. Lynn Bohi warned that she had previously informed the PAC that the leadership in Hartford was not interested in hosting a facility that would removed land from the tax rolls and did not think that was a good idea.

Dan Brand added that only one site passed the cost-benefit analysis. He said that the state has previously discussed the Hanover Street bridge as a way to mitigate congestion at Exit 18. And this could happen regardless of the Intermodal facility.

**Motion:** Dan Brand motioned that the PAC finish the study under its current scope and come up with a product that satisfies the contract, ensuring that both public input and all that has been learned through this process are part of the full report. Paul Boucher seconded.

Steve asked for discussion of the motion. Peter Gregory stated that it will be important to include all public comment in the report. Joanna Whitcomb said there's enough concern about submitting this site that perhaps a minority report could be written by those who oppose suggesting the site and submit that as well. Christine said that she thought that was a good idea

and would help. Peter commented that staff will be burdened with significant time if that is added to the report.

Lynn compared this idea to how VT legislators can move a bill to a floor under the heading “not recommended.”

Steve added that Kit Morgan has been present at many of the meetings and is certainly aware of the political reality.

Nicole warned that she is concerned about recommending the site to DOT and will not support the motion.

Gabe asked if the no-build can be recommended, and several PAC members responded that the PAC is charged with recommending a site.

Dave Saladino added that the PAC will review the report before it is submitted to DOT.

Nicole asked why the PAC couldn't recommend suggestions that came out of the forum (e.g. peripheral park-and-rides). Christine stated that those will certainly be part of the report but it cannot recommend the site based on those concepts as they have not been vetted or validated and the same concept applied to other sites could potential work at many other sites and that it removes the intercity component of the project which is not consistent with the scope of services.

David Palmer said that he sees a loss of excitement among some earlier participant transportation providers – Greyhound, e.g., - in this project, but that local transit providers are still interested in figuring out how to link their routes under a smaller configuration even if the large vision that excited us all in the beginning is being diluted. The project has given us an opportunity to better serve our communities and there has been a lot learned from the process and the work is to be commended.

Steve Schneider called for a vote on the motion. **Motioned passed 11 to 1.**

Steve asked for additional comments.

Gabe Zoerheide reminded the group that another public meeting will be held in June.

The Densmore owner's representative said nobody has spoken about opportunities such as mixed use that could mitigate the City's concern about increased expenses to the City. These activities could be in other places on the property given the Intermodal facility would only take up a small portion of the property. He asked that the report acknowledge this opportunity.

**Meeting adjourned at 2:45.**