

STATE of VERMONT
Grant Application
For
Capital Assistance to States – Intercity Passenger Rail Service

VERMONTER ROUTE

Background

In 1995, the State of Vermont was notified by Amtrak that the only current Intercity Passenger Service “The Montrealer” was being discontinued. Vermont saw this as a significant blow to the citizens of the State’s travel options, as well as a blow to the Tourism business in the State. Vermont is very dependent upon Tourism’s contribution to the State’s economy and without a dependable transportation system, that includes access to the state by Rail, a successful tourism industry could not be maintained. It was with those concerns in mind that the State agreed to partner with Amtrak and provide financial support for a new Intercity Passenger Service, the Vermonter. The Vermonter route includes one train in each direction between St. Albans, Vermont and Washington, DC. The State supported route segment starts in Springfield, Massachusetts east over the CSXT to Palmer, MA where it joins the NECR and north to St. Albans, Vermont.

At that time, the state worked with the operating railroad to provide funds for capital improvements to the line that would permit FRA class III operating speeds and comfortable ride conditions. This was by no means a comprehensive plan of improvements but in reality, one that addressed only the immediate needs in order to initiate the passenger rail service. Over the last twelve years, the railroad has changed ownership three times causing some deferred maintenance issues but they have done an adequate job of maintaining the earlier improvements. The current operator of the line is New England Central, part of RailAmerica, which is now owned by a holding company Fortress Investments, LLC.

Current freight service over the NECR in the project areas includes two daily through freights and one local freight that serves area customers.

Vermont is negotiating the purchase of new passenger rail equipment (DMUs) to operate over the same route but terminating in New Haven, CT with a cross platform transfer to Amtrak’s corridor trains. We expect to increase the frequency over the route between White River Junction and New Haven with one additional train. This service is anticipated to begin in Spring of 2010.

Description of current service:

The Vermonter : The current State supported “Vermont” services the communities in southeastern, central, and northwestern portions of Vermont and Amherst, Massachusetts. There are stations located in the following Vermont communities: Brattleboro, Bellows Falls, Windsor (Ascutney), White River Junction, Randolph, Montpelier, Waterbury, Essex Junction (Burlington), St. Albans as well as Claremont Junction, New Hampshire and Amherst, Massachusetts. The state supported segment of the Vermonter includes all activity north of the station in Springfield, Massachusetts. The train uses Amtrak’s Springfield line to access the Northeast Corridor at New Haven, CT. where the train is electrified and becomes part of Amtrak’s Regional service until it terminates in Washington, DC. Currently the timetable calls for a total trip time To Washington of 13 hours and 30 minutes and a distance of 610 miles. The train consist on the state supported segment is made up 1 locomotive, 3 passenger coaches, a café/business class car, and a cab car. In many cases, 1 additional locomotive is added in the place of the Cab Car. The state supported segment is over 15 train miles of the CSXT line (Springfield to Palmer) and 237 train miles of the New England Central Railroad line (Palmer to St. Albans, VT). Trip time in the current timetable calls for 6 hours and 10 minutes travel time for the state supported segment. The northern portion of the route between White River Junction and St. Albans, VT is part of the designated *Northern New England High Speed Rail Corridor*.

Ridership on the Vermonter, as with many of the state supported routes has improved substantially over the past two years. In the case of the Vermonter the increase was 14% in 2007 for a total of 63,299 riders and for year 2008 (through May) 44,734, a 10.9% increase over the same timeframe in 2007. A copy of the latest ridership report is attached as well as a breakdown of current boardings and alightings by station stop.

The State contract with Amtrak for our two services in federal fiscal year 2008 is for \$3,940,033. Of that amount \$2,663,372 is allocated to the Vermonter service based on the annual P & L which is attached.

The State of Vermont pays 100% of all the direct cost for the Vermonter Amtrak service north of Springfield, Massachusetts station, including the costs associated with the operation of the Station in Amherst, MA..

The most recent monthly ridership report from Amtrak is attached.

Other transportation options:

Vermont Transit (a division of Greyhound) offers daily intercity bus service to some of the communities served by the Vermonter service. The link to the Vermont Transit website is: <http://www.vermonttransit.com/>

Regularly scheduled air service is available from Burlington International Airport to the major cities in the east including Boston, New York, (JFK and Laguardia), Philadelphia, Washington (Dulles, BWI and Reagan) and Orlando as well as some midwest destinations.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Vermont is one of the few states to operate its state supported Amtrak service over Regional and Shortline Railroads. Over the past three years the on time performance (OTP) for the Vermonter has deteriorated substantially. This is due mainly to the multitude of slow orders along the route that continue to plague the railroad and challenge its relatively small amount of forces that must maintain the length of the railroad from New London, CT to East Alburg, Vermont. A considerable number of these slow orders are due to sections of older, poor quality rail and some bridge deck issues. Other slow orders result from the limited amount of funds available for some of the railroad's ongoing capital programs. The regular maintenance crews perform their functions restoring gauge but due to the age of the rail through many segments, their work does not last long and a new slow order has to be issued.

SCOPE OF WORK

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: This is a two part project that includes replacement of one mile of worn outdated rail and redecking of four bridges. The replacement of the old, worn and in most cases non control cooled rail will create a situation for much greater stability and less surface defects along that line segment. Funds from the grant will also be used to accelerate the NECR's "Bridge Deck Renewal Program" resulting in removal of two long standing slow orders and avoiding two others.

The details of the proposed work are shown below:

1. Replace 1 track mile of #100 RA rail with 80' sticks of #115 RE between milepost 105 and 106 of the Roxbury sub in Williston, Vermont
 - a. 10,560 linear feet #115 RE rail installed \$580,000
 2. Replace timbers on structures located at the following milepost:
 - a. 109.15 216 deck ties \$129,600
 - b. 54.92 63 deck ties \$ 37,800
 - c. 39.40 140 deck ties \$ 84,000
 - d. 33.70 90 deck ties \$ 54,000
 3. Vermont Agency of Transportation project oversight \$ 13,800
- Total Project Costs \$900,000

Overall project breakdown:

Materials		
Rail #115 80' & OTM	1 track mile	\$377,000
Deck Timbers	509	\$152,000
Labor		
Install Rail	1 track mile	\$174,000
Bridge work	Install ties	\$154,200
NECR project oversight		\$ 29,000
Project Oversight		\$ 13,800
	Total Project cost	\$900,000

PROJECT TIMING: The project will require procurement of several long lead items, both rail and bridge timbers. Upon grant award, the railroad will begin the procurement process. The actual construction would be concluded in the following construction year. If the timing of the grant allows, work can begin in the fall of 2008 with completion in 2009.

OPERATING CHANGES

At present Amtrak operates one train in each direction daily through the described locations. It is anticipated that upon completion of the enclosed scope of work, the immediate outcome is the removal of 10-12 minutes of speed restrictions per train. In addition to the time savings the safety factor through the project areas will improve dramatically. The new rail also makes for a much smoother ride and improves the overall passenger experience.

Less slowing also results in better fuel efficiency, which is becoming a major issue in the overall cost of the service. In the proposed 2009 contract Amtrak fuel costs have doubled. It is also expected that Amtrak will require Vermont to pay the actual cost of fuel used to operate the trains on a monthly basis.

The on time performance of the Vermonter has deteriorated over the last two years. These improvements along with a commitment from the NECR to their own annual maintenance program will make a considerable difference in the train's on time performance, very likely meeting the goals of 80% or higher. This should result in the customer satisfaction rating improving, leading to increased use of the train and ultimately higher revenue.

Freight Railroad (NECR): Although there is no direct impact attributable to the proposed improvements, the proposed project allows the railroad to move up other projects into their project schedule resulting in capital savings in the overall scheme of things.