

## Greater Middlebury Climate Economy Transportation Task Force

### Statement on Middlebury Rail Platform Siting

April 9, 2018

The restoration of passenger rail service along Vermont's western corridor between Rutland and Burlington is a goal of the State of Vermont and an example of an action that can both reduce carbon use and contribute to a vital regional economy. The Task Force makes the following suggestions regarding the siting of a new rail platform and/or caretaker station<sup>1</sup>.

While the site selection process might be challenging, selected design criteria will guide the final site selection. Our focus will be on the criteria to assess possible sites for the platform, rather than on the merits or drawbacks of particular locations.

The Task Force understands that the current site selection process is focused on a platform that will be used only for two daily Amtrak trains – one in each direction between Burlington and New York City. As the critical assessment of possible platform sites moves forward, we want to encourage a vision of a future transportation system of shared mobility and expanded public transportation, with siting and design conducted in accordance with the principles of transit-oriented design (TOD). Wherever the platform is located, it should offer a convenient and safe environment for passengers, with a shelter providing protection from the weather, seating for persons waiting for trains, good lighting (since trains may be stopping in Middlebury during the hours of darkness), and reliable cell phone service.

The Task Force believes that there are at least three important criteria in deciding where to site the platform: 1) served by transit; 2) expandable to more frequent commuter service; and 3) in a convenient and accessible downtown location for growing shared mobility.

First, the platform should be in a location that is currently on the route of, or very close to, existing public transportation services. The platform should be proximate to current bus routes or "activity nodes" linked by local and regional buses. The idea is an easy stop near the platform to pick up and drop off passengers, especially the young and elderly. There should be a bus loading/unloading point adjacent to the platform, as well as shared mobility options including eBikes, charging, bicycle parking, easy vehicular drop-off, and accessibility to ride-sharing and similar services.

Second, the site should be sufficiently adaptable and flexible to support additional transportation uses in the future. We understand that a private company, AllEarth Rail, has purchased several Budd rail diesel cars. Thus, there may be an opportunity in the future to launch a commuter service to Burlington using these rail cars. As the state's rail network develops, Amtrak might also consider providing more frequent service between Burlington and Albany, using self-propelled diesel multiple units (DMUs), rather than locomotives and coaches. The siting decision should also reflect other developments likely to happen during the useful life

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<sup>1</sup> 2013 Amtrak Station Program and Planning Guide, page 4 defines caretaker station, no tickets, unstaffed.

of the platform, such as expansion of Uber and similar ride-hailing services into rural Vermont, car-sharing, and future use of autonomous vehicles.

Third, the platform should be in downtown Middlebury. One of the Task Force's goals is to reduce the number and frequency of short, single-occupant fossil-fuel powered vehicle trips in and around the center of Middlebury. Downtown locations and other criteria as suggested in this statement are highlighted in a set of stories for the New Haven-Hartford-Springfield Rail Program in ["Transit-Oriented Development \(TOD\) Success Stories"](#).

A platform or caretaker station located close to downtown would allow passengers to arrive and leave by foot – if they live downtown – or by bus. The location must be convenient for tourists arriving in Middlebury – to reach establishments such as the Middlebury Inn, The Inn on the Green, or the Marriott through an easy walk by foot or by using an existing bus service.

Middlebury College will likely be a principal origin and destination of Amtrak riders, including current students (especially before and after academic-year breaks and at the beginning and end of summer language sessions), prospective students visiting the College, and other visitors including guest speakers and candidates for jobs on the faculty and staff. A station located close to downtown will enable those traveling to and from the College to reach the station either on foot or by an existing bus service.

Long-term parking for Amtrak passengers at this platform should not be a criterion for ranking highly in the siting decision. The highest priority for downtown parking spaces should be for customers and clients of downtown businesses and offices, with the next-highest priority going to those employed downtown. The Vergennes Amtrak platform is adjacent to an extensive park-and-ride lot. Middlebury-area passengers with no other way to get to Amtrak except by driving their own vehicles could park in Vergennes.

The accompanying Google Maps show that the elements suggested above are present in a corridor along the railroad route through downtown Middlebury, extending from the railroad bridge over the Otter Creek in the south to slightly north of the intersection of Seymour and Elm Streets in the north. A platform located at some point along this corridor would satisfy the criteria identified in this statement. A location along this corridor would be compatible with transit-oriented development, would provide for pedestrian access and vehicular drop-off, would be near existing transit routes, and would contribute to the economic and physical development of a vibrant Middlebury.

#### *About the Greater Middlebury Climate Economy Transportation Task Force*

The above statement was drafted by Eric Davis, a member of the Greater Middlebury Climate Economy Transportation Task Force, and was revised and adopted by the Task Force at a meeting held on April 9, 2018.

The Task Force is an initiative of the Vermont Council on Rural Development. The task force is one of four working groups, made up of community volunteers, technical experts and stakeholders, that have as their goal to achieve significant carbon reduction, while also supporting a thriving and inclusive local economy of businesses and institutions.