

AD HOC COMMITTEE - CLAREMONT AMTRAK STOP
INITIAL REPORT
August 27, 2014

1. **ORGANIZATION** – The City Council authorized the creation of the ad hoc committee on July 23, 2014 in order to assess the current state of the train stop and determine how it could be improved. The Council appointed Councilors Lovett (Chair), Reed and Towle to the committee. The committee convened its first meeting on July 30th, and has met weekly thereafter (Aug 5th, 12th, 20th, 26th). At this time, committee members include the three Councilors and State Representative Raymond Gagnon. The committee voted to have a maximum of seven members, and continues to seek other individuals who may be interested in becoming a member.
2. **MISSION** – The mission of the committee is to develop a plan to improve the Claremont Amtrak Stop (physical location and website) in order to increase ridership, promote economic development and support tourism in the region. A by-product of accomplishing this mission will be the strengthening of our position as a stop on the Northern New England Intercity Rail Initiative (NNEIRI) which is currently under discussion. See Appendix A for additional information on the NNEIRI.

This work supports objectives outlined in Chapter 8 (Transportation) of the City's Master Plan, as well as the City's Strategic Planning Document.

3. **APPROACH** – In order to accomplish its mission, the Committee has developed a multi-phase approach as follows:
 - a. **Exploratory Phase** -The first phase is the exploratory phase and includes an assessment of the current situation, identification of the upgrades needed, and prioritization of those upgrades. This report is the culmination of the Committee's work during the 5-week exploratory phase, and sets the stage for the second phase.
 - b. **Developmental Phase** – The second phase is the developmental phase and consists of the development of both short term and long term plans for upgrading services and amenities. Because of the research required to develop these plans and estimated costs, this phase will be much longer. For the sake of progress, the Committee will focus on the development of short term plans before concentrating on the long term. The Committee will provide the Council periodic updates with the first report due in October.
 - c. **Implementation Phase** – The third phase is the implementation phase. Once the City Council approves either the short term or long term plans for upgrading services/amenities, the Committee will focus its efforts on acquiring the resources (i.e. grants, partnerships, etc.) necessary to implement the plans.

4. EXPLORATORY PHASE COMPLETED –

a. Situation Assessment –

- (1) **Amtrak Line** - The Vermonter is the Amtrak line that runs from St. Albans, VT, to Washington D.C. via New York City. See Appendix B for Vermonter train line route. (Note: Softcopy versions of report do not contain Appendix B as this information can be accessed via the Amtrak website) The train stops twice daily in Claremont at 11:42am and 5:59pm. Although White River Junction, VT, is also a stop that serves the Lebanon-Hanover area, Claremont is the only NH stop on the line. Claremont is also the only Amtrak stop on the western side of the state. The Downeaster is another Amtrak line that has three stops on the eastern side of the state; Dover, Durham and Exeter with Thruway Bus Connections to other NH communities.
- (2) **Physical Location** - The Claremont train stop is adjacent to the Claremont Cycle Shop, owned by John Lambert. Amtrak leases the rail from New England Central and maintains the right-of-way land between the rail bed and the depot building housing the cycle shop. Amtrak has installed signage at the platform, as well as lighting and a wheelchair lift. It leases two handicap parking spaces and six regular parking spaces from John Lambert who owns the parking lot in front of the bike shop. However, this arrangement will last only as long as this parking is not needed by Claremont Cycle Depot.
- (3) **Available Services/Amenities** - With the exception of the wheelchair lift, there are no services or amenities available at the train stop. Consequently, the Claremont Cycle Shop is often the recipient of passengers looking for information, bathroom facilities, refreshments and transportation. John Lambert and bike shop personnel have been extremely generous in offering passengers what they can as they can. However, with the exception of Friday night, the shop is closed when the evening train arrives. Consequently, passengers are often stranded and have no one to assist them with their travel needs.
- (4) **Website** – Passengers going to the Claremont Stop on the Amtrak Website will find nothing offered in the way of services/amenities. Passengers interested in finding places to eat will find 41 restaurants from which to choose. Passengers looking for things to do in the area will find 3 items listed; Maple Lanes Bowling, Holy Resurrection Church and North Country Smokehouse (pictures do not match business).
- (5) **Ridership** – In FY 2013, Amtrak recorded 2123 riders using the Claremont Stop. With the exception of 2011, the Claremont Stop has experienced an annual increase in ridership from FY 06 through FY 13. The decrease in ridership in 2011 was directly attributed to Tropical Storm Irene and scheduled upgrades to the line. Over an 8 year span, ridership has increased a total of 48%. See Appendix C for additional ridership data.

b. Identification of needed amenities/services

- (1) Transportation Service** – Currently, nothing exists. There is a sign on the external wall of the bike shop listing a taxi service out of VT. However, this is not a cost effective option as travelers using this service must pay for the taxi to get to the stop, as well as to their destination point. During the course of our research, we were told of instances in which passengers arrived in Claremont (from as far away as Australia) expecting transportation service to find none, a passenger who walked with luggage to the Common Man and passengers who, by chance, received a ride into town by Mr. Lambert or bike shop personnel.
- (2) Protected Waiting Area** – There is no protected waiting area. Currently, the waiting area consists of two wooden benches parallel to the tracks, and two wooden benches next to the bike shop entrance. These were donated by the Lamberts for passenger use. However, all four are only partially protected by the overhang of the shop's roof and, as a result of weathering, are in very poor shape.
- (3) Information** – Amtrak signage provides a 1-800 number and website for passengers needing information, as well as a schedule for the Vermonter line. Also, there are signs on the external wall of the bike shop advertising lodging and a limousine service. This information is either incomplete or outdated. The bike shop does have 2014 Amtrak System Timetable books and brochures of the Vermonter Line, but passengers have access to those items only when the shop is open. Amtrak does provide arrival updates via cellphone, and there is a payphone and telephone book located on the external wall of the bike shop. No other information regarding the City or region exists at the train stop.
- (4) Refreshments** – Other than snacks/drinks provided by the bike shop when possible, there is no food or beverage on site. The Lamberts had installed vending machines, but removed them due to vandalism.
- (5) Parking** – Other than spaces (2 handicap and 6 regular) leased by John Lambert to Amtrak, there is no dedicated short term or long term parking.
- (6) Signage** – On-site signage of Claremont or the surrounding region is either out-of-date or non-existent. Additionally, there is no signage in the community directing people to the train stop.
- (7) Snow Removal** – Jeremy Zullo is under contract and Amtrak certified to remove snow at the train stop. However, this service is not extensive enough to ensure that passenger waiting areas remain clear during and shortly after a snowstorm. Bike shop personnel have augmented snow removal during such times.
- (8) Landscaping** – No one is contracted to maintain the train stop for landscaping purposes. Though bike shop personnel have mowed/trimmed grass as business allows, grass does grow too high and weeds prosper. There are no flowers. The platform asphalt and yellow markings need attention. The railroad tie that borders the platform is severely splintered on one end.
- (9) Security** – There are several security cameras on site, but they are the property of Claremont Cycle Depot and dedicated to protecting that building and adjoining parking lot.

- (1) **Outreach** – The Committee will continue to broaden its outreach efforts with community members, and explore public-private partnership opportunities.
 - (2) **Survey** – Surveying passengers will ensure that we are developing short and long term plans that are responsive to the needs of today’s passengers.
- b. Collaboration** – Prior to the creation of the ad hoc committee, Claremont Planning and Development had participated in NNEIRI Stakeholder meetings. Though the Committee’s focus is improving the train stop, it also supports the City’s efforts to be a stop on the Intercity Rail Initiative. Consequently, we believe that a collaborative approach will provide the best outcomes for all concerned. Hence, we think it is important that Planning and Development participate (as possible) at Committee meetings, and the Committee is present (as possible) during NNEIRI discussions. At a minimum, a letter should be presented to the NNEIRI stakeholders informing them of the Committee’s work to improve the train stop.
 - c. Signage Installation** – The Committee will work with the City to identify the number of Community and Trailblazer signs needed, and provide recommendations for signage location.
 - d. October Report to the City Council** – The Committee will present short term plans for the upgrading of services/amenities with regard to passenger comfort/safety, transportation and signage.