

# Chapter 25: Rail

## INTRODUCTION

Rail transportation – both freight and passenger - continues to be vital to the economy of the State and the Region. It is the most efficient mode for transporting bulk commodities and can be a competitive option for other merchandise and passengers. Rail infrastructure in the Region is widespread and outdated; service is available but limited in scope.

This chapter of the *Regional Plan* considers the services and constraints of the Region's freight and passenger rail facilities recognizing that rail issues are national in scope. It also examines rail's relationships with other modes of transportation and with economic development.

## CURRENT CONDITIONS

### Network

Three rail companies serve the Rutland area: Vermont Railway Inc [VTR], its subsidiary the Clarendon and Pittsford Railroad [CLP], and the Green Mountain Railroad Company [GMR]. All are part of the Vermont Railway System, operating on tracks and rights-of-way owned by the State of Vermont except for the Clarendon and Pittsford which owns all of its facilities. All are considered "local" railroads.

Rutland is one of the primary nodes in the Vermont Railway, Inc. network. Lines extend north, south, west, and southeast from Rutland to serve the entire southern section of Vermont. Virtually all rail traffic in the Region comes through this central node.

With the exception of the CLP, bridge capacities for railroads are limited to railcars with a gross weight of 263,000 pounds; the CLP is rated for 286,000 pounds, the minimum national standard.

### Freight Service

Freight traffic in the Region falls into two

categories: "bridge" traffic moves through the Region without stopping, most often running to and from intermodal facilities in Albany, NY, Springfield, MA and Montreal; local traffic originates from or is destined to Vermont businesses.

The Rutland Railyard, presently functioning at capacity, is technically a re-classifying and holding yard for rail cars. It does not handle transloading and the only commodity that is unloaded is road salt for VTrans and towns.

Freight services are currently provided daily on most routes. Vermont Railway operates two through freight trains per day with four locals and a switcher from Rutland to Burlington six days per week, The Green Mountain line operates two through freight trains six days a week between Rutland and Bellows Falls; CLP line from Rutland to Whitehall, New York, operates two through freight trains daily. Vermont Railway operates through freight four days a week on its line extending south from Rutland to Bennington and Hoosic Falls.

According to the *Vermont State Rail Plan: Update 2005*, the total freight rail



### FAST FACT

The trail from Whitehall, owned by the Clarendon & Pittsford, serves as a gateway for rail traffic entering the State of Vermont from the west. To the north, Vermont Railway serves Burlington and communities in between. To the south, the Vermont Railway serves Manchester and Bennington. To the southeast, the Green Mountain Railway serves Ludlow and Chester and connects in Bellows Falls with the Central Vermont and Boston and Maine Railroads.



Vermont Railway—Shaun McGinnis

Vermont Railway runs daily freight services like this one in Center Rutland



### **FAST FACT**

All rail lines in the Region are classified by the Association of American Railroads as “local” or “short-line” railroads. These are line haul railroads operating less than 350 miles of road and/or earning annual revenue less than \$40 million [source: Draft State Rail Plan, chapter 2, page 10 – R.L. Banks and Associates, inc.



### **DEFINITIONS**

Bridge and Local Traffic:

Bridge rail traffic passes through the State without any loading or unloading of goods.

Local Rail traffic has its origin or destination within the State.

traffic terminating or originating in Vermont decreased by over 20% between 1992 and 2002. Total tons of freight originated in the State increased by 77% over the same time period, however, largely attributable to calcium carbonate shipments from Omya, Inc.

Nonmetallic minerals, glass and stone made up a greater proportion of the tons originated in 2002 [95%] than in 1992 [76%]. The most striking change has taken place in the transport of lumber and wood products. These products dropped from 21% of total tons shipped in 1992 to two percent in 2002.

### ***Passenger Rail Service***

Amtrak provides daily passenger service between Penn Station in New York City, Albany and Fair Haven and Rutland City via the CLP line. Tourist-oriented excursion passenger service is occasionally offered along the Green Mountain line, as well as along the Vermont Railway line north of Rutland.

### ***The Rutland Rail Yard***

Historically, Rutland was the hub of rail activity for the

Region and the State. Until the mid-1950s, its active rail yard and station were the bulwark of the local economy. While most of the rail activity is gone, the yard remains in the center of the City.

The four rail lines serving Western Vermont converge on the Rutland switching yard, and it is here that trains are made up to move goods to multiple destinations across the region and nation. The configuration of the yard makes it difficult to conduct efficient switching operations. Additionally, all trains serving the region must pass through this yard – even those coming in from the east and going north as there is no connecting link outside of the City to accommodate the east-north or south-west movement.

## **UNMET NEEDS**

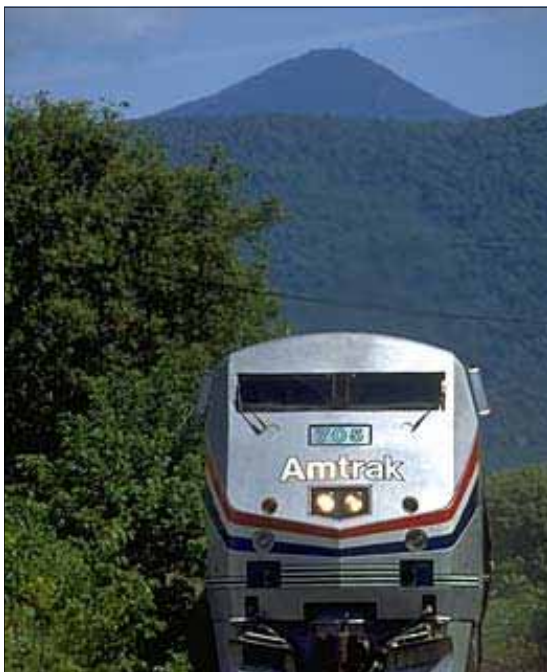
### ***Rail Facilities***

Rail lines in the Region and throughout Vermont have physical constraints, including poor track condition, limited interchange track, sidings or yard tracks and limited overhead or side clearances. The consequence of these are inadequate speeds, restrictions on bridge and track load rating capacities and the lack of efficient intermodal transfer points.

The lack and condition of passenger rail-related facilities resembles the lack and condition of freight rail facilities, with added need for stations as well as levels and types of service that meet the need of commuters, vacationers, and others likely to use such facilities.

### ***Financing Issues***

Even with state ownership of most of the rail infrastructure in the Region, there has not been a consistent, sufficient source of funds to bring rail beds, bridges, and other infrastructure up to the level needed to effectively compete in today’s markets. “By their very nature,” said the Vermont State *Rail Plan Update*, “short line



www.rutlanddown.com

Amtrak offers daily service on the Ethan Allen line between Rutland and New York City

railroads do not have the resources to make significant upgrades in their infrastructure”.

### Rail Yard

By virtue of its location, a slice of land snaking along the edge of downtown Rutland behind the shopping center, there are conflicts between trains passing through the yards and/or coupling or uncoupling cars and vehicles. There are many safety issues related to the location of an active railyard in this location.

### Rail Crossings

There are 70 at-grade crossings in the Region and nine above grade and seven below grade. Of the at-grade crossings, 30 are unsignalized, 35 are signalized and only five are gated. The condition of crossings range from uneven and rough to smooth, particularly those recently rebuilt with rubber pads.

## FUTURE TRENDS

### Rail Infrastructure Improvements

Improvements to rail infrastructure will continue to be an issue to the vitality of this mode in the Region and State. The Gateway Rural Improvement Pilot Project (see Case Study following) addresses many of these, particularly track and bridge rehabilitation necessary to achieve the desired operating speeds for future passenger service and the necessary improvements to upgrade the mainline and sidings to FRA Class III standards and 286,000 lb. axle loadings.

The bridge program includes the necessary structural repairs and upgrades to support 286,000 lb. loads now the current standard for the freight railroad industry. The grade crossing program includes the

installation of new automatic warning signals or the upgrade of the existing systems at each grade crossing on the corridor, as well as the reconstruction of the highway grade crossing surfaces at critical locations.

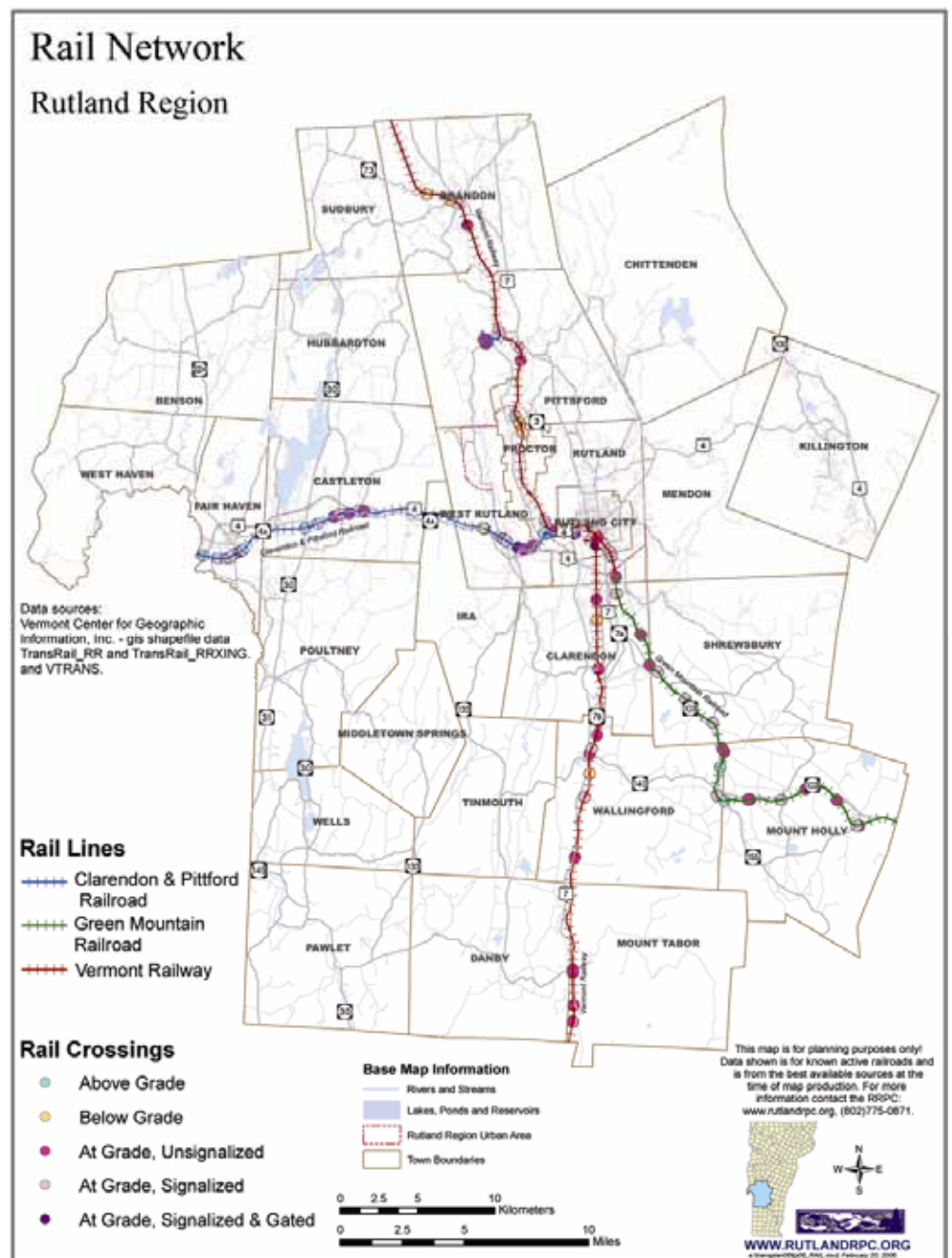
### Governance

Administration of the rail program will continue to be discussed in the coming years. While the Agency is moving toward improving the coordination and implementation of rail projects, it is stymied by funding and governance issues. A recommendation has been made to look at



### FAST FACT

**Freight densities.** All lines in the Region [CLP, GMR, and VTR - north from Rutland] carry between one and three mgt [million gross tons] per year; the VTR south of Rutland carries less than one mgt per year.





**FAST FACT**

**TRACK MILEAGE:**

The Region is home to a total of 97 miles of track.

- Clarendon and Pittsford- 19 miles
- Green Mountain- 19.5 miles
- Vermont Railway - 45.6 miles
- Other - 12.9 miles



**FAST FACT**

Intercity passenger rail ridership on the Ethan Allen Express declined 12 percent from June of 2000 to June of 2004 [42, 992 passengers vs. 37,966 passengers]. The State, one of a small number, continues to make some financial contribution to the operation of Amtrak trains.

innovative funding mechanisms and improving the administration of programs, expanding on the recently completed Report of the Summer Study Committee on a Rail Authority.

**MEETING CURRENT AND FUTURE NEEDS**

*Cooperation and Collaboration*

Rail issues will only be resolved with a variety of partnerships, starting at the regional level and extending up to the Agency of Transportation and beyond, including the private sector. Recent federal funding provides resources to begin to implement the pilot’s strategies. To insure that these funds are used in the most appropriate places the regional planning organizations in the corridor must work with others to insure the prioritization of projects in the most efficient manner.

Of major importance are improvements to facilities, specifically the upgrading of bridges to handle fully loaded 286,000-pound railcars and resolving clearance issues, bringing tunnels, and highway bridges over railroads, into conformance with modern railroad standards. All major public roads not equipped with active warning devices should be upgraded to include automatic gates.

Vermont is too small a market to support containerized cargo moving through large intermodal facilities. Instead, smaller transloading facilities, such as the TransLink operation proposed for Fair Haven, will provide the appropriate access to connect Vermont businesses to larger intermodal facilities in neighboring states. In addition, alternative routing from Albany through Bennington and Manchester and

extending up to Burlington is suggested.

Communities need to plan for land uses adjacent to rail lines and develop policies that will encourage, where appropriate, the use of these lands for rail-related development activities.

**RUTLAND RPC ACTIONS**

- Continue to support efforts to improve the management and delivery of projects that improve rail facilities in the Region, particularly the Western Gateway Pilot Project with particular emphasis on the relocation of the Rutland Rail yard.
- Support – as appropriate – recommendations of the *Vermont State Rail Plan Update: 2005*
- Support the establishment of appropriate transloading facilities.
- Continue to work with local, regional and state development organizations to identify parcels along the rail line that might serve as sites for rail-related development.
- Facilitate completion of needed rail crossing projects.
- Remain an active participant on future statewide rail planning efforts.
- Review land uses and zoning adjacent to transportation projects; work with local decisions-makers to address conflicts, opportunities and interdependencies.

## CASE STUDY

# Western Vermont Gateway Rural Improvement Pilot Project

## *A Federally-recognized project of corridor rail improvements*

Vermont is in the forefront of corridor transportation planning with its Western Corridor, comprised of a short-line rail line and a National Highway System route in a rural area. The strategy for the Gateway Rural Improvement Pilot Project, which was recognized for a \$30 million earmark in the Federal transportation reauthorization bill, *Safe Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy For Users* in 2005, is to demonstrate the benefits to a rural rail corridor of a freight transportation gateway program. The projects will provide community and highway benefits by addressing economic development, congestion, security, safety, and environmental issues.

Rutland lies in the heart of the western Vermont corridor framed by US Route 7 and the Vermont Railway line running from Bennington to Burlington. The Region's rail and road networks will benefit from this project by improving the load capacity of the track and bridges in the corridor, allowing for increased volume of commodities each rail car can handle and, therefore, reducing the number of trucks on the road network.

Important highway surface and safety improvements at grade crossings will also be included. By improving the reliability and cost effectiveness of freight and passenger rail service, rail users will choose to use this mode more often. This will not only reduce the wear and tear on the existing road network, but also the need for future capacity expansion projects. An efficient and reliable network will also attract new or relocated businesses and industries.

Significant freight transloading between rail and truck is performed at VTR's intermodal and classification yard in Rutland. Freight levels are expected to expand steadily in this segment over the next several years. Relocating the existing rail yard in Rutland from its current downtown location to an area south of US Route 4 near Clarendon would help to minimize the current rail / highway conflicts downtown and release a large parcel of land for economic development by the City of Rutland.

### Specific projects included in the Pilot:

- Construction of the Middlebury Spur, a direct rail connection to OMYA's quarry
- Relocation and enlargement of the Rutland Railyard
- Track improvements in the Albany-Bennington-Rutland-Burlington corridor
- Construction of an Intermodal Connector in St. Albans
- Development of a Freight Management System



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