

Summary of the Amtrak Great American Stations Meeting in Burlington, VT 8 December, 2011

For: The Essex Junction Board of Trustees

Submitted by: George Tyler, president
Essex Junction Board of Trustees
21 December, 2011

Executive Summary of Lunch Meeting with Amtrak, NECR, and Vtrans officials:

- Dave Crawford, Jaye O'Connell, and George Tyler of Essex Junction met with Joe McHugh, vice president of Amtrak Government Affairs and Corporate Communications, Joseph Rago, senior director of Amtrak engineering construction, Charles Hunter of NECR, and Brian Searles, Vtrans. Others were present at the lunch meeting, but these were the principal speakers.
- Tyler, Crawford, and Searles inquired about Amtrak's plans for upgrading the Essex Junction station. Rago and McHugh said Amtrak's only immediate plans for the station were to bring it into ADA compliance by building an access ramp. They had no additional plans for upgrading the station. Rago said that at some point they might consider minor improvements to the waiting area.
- Crawford inquired about the Village undertaking station improvements on its own, including developing a design and acting as the site manager/contractor for overseeing the construction. Rago responded that it would be difficult to obtain Amtrak's (his office's) approval for an independent upgrade. There would be compliance and engineering design issues. He suggested that the Village might submit plans to his office and they could possibly be implemented by Amtrak at some later date. Tyler pointed out that there was community momentum for moving forward with the upgrade now. McHugh inquired if the Village had plans for a different multimodal station in the future. Tyler explained that there were such long range plans, but they were vague and many years away.
- McHugh responded that his office was committed to helping communities improve their stations and that he would assist the Village in moving forward with a station upgrade now. There was consensus that the Village could take the initiative independently of Amtrak's plan to build an access ramp. McHugh stated that the Village's plans would have to be approved by Rago's office and meet other Amtrak requirements, but he did not see these as significant obstacles. He suggested that the principal parties (Village, Amtrak, NECR) meet again in late January to keep the process moving ahead. He also invited Tyler and Crawford to "call him anytime" if he could assist with the Village's efforts.

Conclusion: We (Village) should determine what we want to do with the station as soon as possible. We have some preliminary designs, but these are not appropriate for submitting to Amtrak nor for actually carrying out construction. As soon as possible, we should determine how we are going to

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develop a real, working design for the station upgrade that can be submitted to Amtrak. How to proceed with this task should be on our agenda in January. We should also begin to consider possible funding sources. However, as the design will determine the cost, the first step will be developing a working blueprint.

Summary of Presentations:

The meeting included seven presentations that examined the following subjects:

1. **Northeast Corridor** - Current efforts and envisioned plans for improvements to the Northeast passenger rail corridor, presented by James Redeker, Commissioner of Connecticut Dept. of Transportation.
2. **ADA Compliance** - Current efforts to bring Amtrak stations into compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.
3. **Funding Sources** - Discussion of sources of funding for upgrades to existing stations and for constructing new stations, presented by Patrick Kidd, Government and Corporate Affairs Researcher for Amtrak.
4. **Case Study** - Study of the upgrade of the Amtrak station in Kirkwood, MO with focus on the role played by volunteers, presented by Bill Burckhalter, station volunteer coordinator.
5. **Real Estate** – Overview of Amtrak lease/ownership issues for new and existing stations, presented by Mike Angelo, Amtrak senior director of real estate development.
6. **Historic Preservation** – Constraints imposed on station upgrades by need to comply with historic preservation requirements; benefits of historic preservation, presented by Patrick Kidd, Government and Corporate Affairs Researcher for Amtrak.
7. **Economic Development** – Case studies of economic development impacts of reconstructing train stations, in Brunswick, Maine and Meridian, Mississippi.

Conclusion: These presentations provided a wealth of funding and technical information relevant to the station upgrade, as well as more general information regarding the economic development benefits of train station upgrades. All of the information was compiled and stored on thumb drives given to each attendee. The case study information regarding the economic development impacts of train station improvements will be useful in sustaining community support for our efforts on Railroad Ave.