

TC Purpose and Need

Background

The City of Burlington, located on the eastern shore of Lake Champlain, is the largest municipality in the state of Vermont. Chittenden County, which includes Burlington, is home to approximately 153,000 people (in 2008), which is approximately 25% of the state's population of 622,000 people. Studies by the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC) and the Chittenden County Metropolitan Planning Organization (CCMPO) have concluded that employment and population will continue to grow.

The Chittenden County Transportation Authority (CCTA) is the public transit service provider in Chittenden, Washington, Franklin, Grand Isle, and Lamoille counties. Outside of Chittenden County CCTA operates as the Green Mountain Transit Agency (GMTA). CCTA operates regular fixed-route bus service in the communities of Burlington, Essex, South Burlington, Shelburne, Williston, Winooski, and a portion of Colchester. LINK Express routes operate on corridors between Burlington and Montpelier, Middlebury, and St. Albans, and a commuter route connects Milton and Burlington.

CCTA is considered a municipal corporation and is the first and only transit authority in the State of Vermont. CCTA is governed by a thirteen member Board of Commissioners with representation from each of the following communities: Burlington (2), Essex, Hinesburg, Shelburne, South Burlington, Milton, Williston and Winooski, Washington County, Franklin County, Lamoille County, and Grand Isle County.

CCTA's service operates on a "pulse" system. Pulse transit systems are common in smaller communities and typically operate out of a central area with vehicles meeting at fixed intervals. Routes are located and designed so that the cycle time for each route (the amount of time it takes to travel from the beginning of the route to the end and back, including any layover time) is the same or equal to some multiple of the pulse interval. Pulse transit minimizes transfer time between routes.

CCTA's pulse operation at the Cherry Street transit station currently comprises seven local routes (Essex Junction, North Avenue, Pine Street, City Loop, Riverside/Winooski, Shelburne Road, and Williston), five commuter routes (three LINK routes to Montpelier, Middlebury and St. Albans, plus Milton and Williston), and limited trips on three other routes (Neighborhood Specials, Lakeside Commuter, and the South Burlington Circulator).



Local routes generally provide service every half-hour throughout the day with three routes operating every fifteen minutes during the peaks. The LINK regional services operate two to four trips during each peak period, with two providing mid-day service and one providing evening service.

In addition to the space needed at the downtown hub for these operations, one spare berth is required for a “breakdown” bus. Expansion plans for the future indicate a need for five additional berths compared to present service.

CCTA ridership has grown by 63 percent over the ten year period from 1999 to 2009 and continues to grow. LINK regional ridership saw an average growth of 40% per year between 2004 and 2009. Based on 2011 survey data, over 2,500 boardings occur at the Cherry Street station on an average weekday, about one quarter of all boardings system-wide. Some 43% of passengers boarding there are transferring from another route (over 1,000 per weekday). A recent transfer analysis shows that transfers occur among all of the routes serving the station, not just a few pairs of routes.

Importance of Public Transit

Nationally, public transportation ridership grew 34% from 1995 through 2009, more than twice the growth rate of the U.S. population (15%) and substantially more than the growth for vehicle miles of travel (VMT) on our nation’s streets and highways (23%) over the same period.¹ Transit ridership is continuing to grow and federal and state agencies are continuing to invest in its future, allowing regions to offer higher quality services.

At the local level, American communities are beginning to recognize the importance of public transportation and understand how transit can be a contributing force in achieving greater livability in communities². Public transit provides many benefits, including:

- Connecting people to jobs, education, health care, cultural and recreational opportunities.
- Relieving congestion in the region by removing auto trips from the highway system.
- Stimulating economic development and helping to maintain the vitality of cities’ central business districts, by keeping downtown areas thriving as centers of finance, commerce, retail and culture.
- Reducing energy consumption and improving air quality.

¹ 2011 Public Transportation Fact Book, 62nd Edition, April 2011, American Public Transportation Association

² The Role of Transit in Creating Livable Metropolitan Communities, TCRP Report 22, Transit Cooperative Research Program



Research indicates that public transit improvements and more transit-oriented development can also provide large but often overlooked health benefits³. People who live or work in communities with high quality public transportation tend to drive significantly less and rely more on alternative modes (walking, cycling and public transit) than they would in more automobile-oriented areas. This translates into positive results such as reducing traffic crashes and pollution emissions, increasing physical fitness and mental health, and providing access to medical care and healthy food. Providing high quality public transit can be one of the most cost effective ways to achieve public health objectives.

Vermont has long understood the importance of public transportation in the Burlington region. Locally, there have been a number of municipal plans prepared in recent years, each one emphasizing how vital transit options are in and to Burlington. Excerpts from several of these plans include:

- **Moving Forward Together**, Transportation Plan for City of Burlington, City of Burlington and CEDO, Draft March 23, 2010 (page 3) – *“Transit availability is critical, especially for the young, the old, those without cars, and those who otherwise are dependent on transit. It also is becoming increasingly important that transit be attractive to those who do not rely solely on public transportation, some of whom must shift to transit if the City is to increase the number of travelers in and out of the core.”*
- **2011 Municipal Development Plan**, City of Burlington, March 28, 2010 (page V-12) – *“Public transportation is perhaps the single most important component in a future transportation system that will serve the city and region. While public transit will not likely dominate automobile use, it does offer the greatest opportunity for improved efficiency and mobility.”*
- **2011 Municipal Development Plan**, City of Burlington, March 28, 2010 (pages V-12 & 13) – *“The advantage of public transportation is that more people can be served for fewer dollars. This means less traffic, fewer highways, cleaner air, safer travel, less space devoted to parking and greater opportunities for lower income residents and those who choose not to drive.”*
- **2011 Municipal Development Plan**, City of Burlington, March 28, 2010 (page V-13) – *“Burlington’s climate offers another deterrent to greater use of public transit, as most bus stops are unsheltered from cold winds, provide few amenities and offer little information ... If we are to capture a greater percentage of trips with public transit, the comfort and convenience of the user must be a guiding principle.”*
- **Legacy Project Action Plan**, City of Burlington, June 2000 (page 8) – *“Well-trained workers will earn high wages while living and working right here in Burlington, commuting easily to their jobs using an affordable, accessible, and seamless public transportation system and bicycle – and pedestrian – friendly roads and sidewalks.”*

³ *Evaluating Public Transportation Health Benefits* APTA and the Victoria Transport Policy Institute, June 14, 2010



- **Burlington Climate Action Plan**, City of Burlington, 2000 (page 4, Transportation Chapter) – *“Priority transportation demand management (TDM) strategies now being evaluated by regional and local planners in Burlington and Chittenden County include: Expanding and further developing park-and-ride lots to encourage ride-sharing and shuttle services; Expanding public transit system routes, increasing frequency of service, and providing free shuttles for large events...”*

The mission of CCTA is to operate safe, convenient, accessible, innovative and sustainable public transportation services in the northwest and central Vermont region that reduce congestion and pollution, encourage transit-oriented development and enhance the quality of life for all⁴. By providing these services, the people of Burlington and the region benefit tremendously by having affordable transportation options. CCTA strengthens the economic fabric of the region by linking people with jobs, provides environmental and health benefits related to reduced vehicle emissions, reduces the number of single occupant autos on Burlington roadways, and lessens the demand on the already constrained parking system in Burlington.

To meet the needs of the region, CCTA will continue to serve its current customers by maintaining and enhancing the existing services, and continue to grow and expand in order to meet the needs of future customers.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the CCTA Transit Center (TC) is to replace the inadequate Cherry Street transit station with a modern passenger facility that:

- Supports the needs of the traveling public that are best met with public transit;
- Supports the current levels of service and ridership;
- Provides convenient transit connections to existing services;
- Provides amenities for transit patrons and bus drivers;
- Encourages new ridership;
- Allows for growth in service and ridership; and
- Enhances safety and security by design.

Other important benefits of such a facility include improving the economic vitality, environment, and quality of life of the Burlington area.

⁴ CCTA Transit Development Plan, September 2010



The Need for the TC is driven by several factors, including:

- Inadequacy of the existing facility to support current ridership and service;
- Inability to accommodate ridership and service growth;
- Negative impacts due to the numerous bus crossings of the Church Street Marketplace; and
- Opportunity to improve streetscape and foster private investment to ensure continued vibrancy of downtown.

The following sections describe the need for the project with respect to each of these four areas.

Inadequacy of Existing Facility to Support Current Ridership and Service

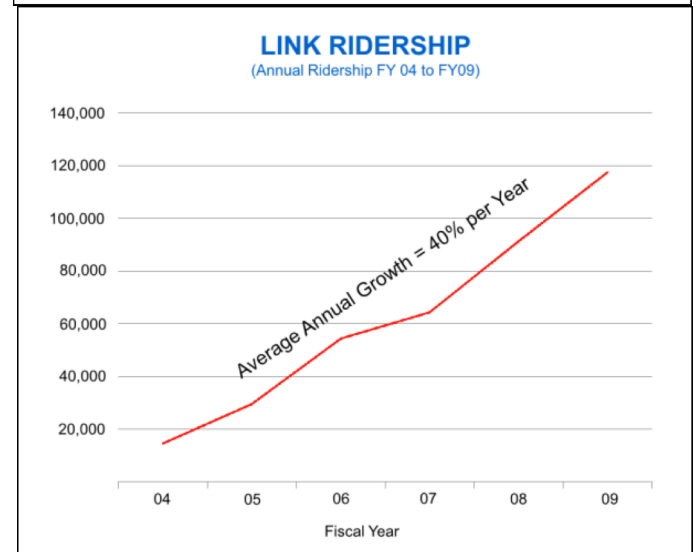
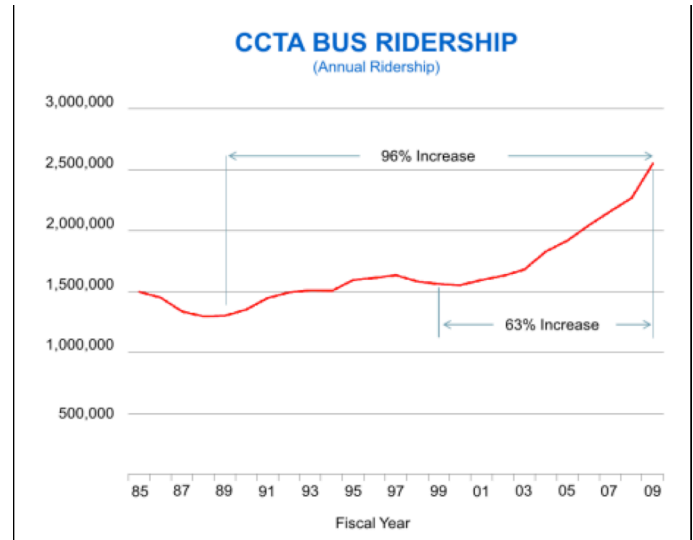
The existing Cherry Street facility, built in 1981, lacks basic amenities and passenger facilities, which will be available in the TC.

- The existing facility on Cherry Street is cramped and provides few amenities for passengers beyond seating and a partial canopy. Adequate shelter from the elements, access to public restrooms, an indoor passenger waiting area with seating, and other services are important factors in a rider's decision to begin or continue to use public transit. The less comfortable and convenient transit is perceived to be; the more difficult it is to retain existing and attract new riders. In a recent passenger survey about the current facility, availability of restrooms, crowding on the platform, and protection from the weather received the lowest ratings among seven attributes.
- The perceived safety of the waiting area is also important in a potential rider's decision to use public transit. The current facility is over-crowded, not attractive and has the potential to make some riders feel less secure. At a minimum, it is unappealing to many people.
- The existing facility has limited information available concerning expected bus departure times. In order to maintain existing ridership and support growth, the facility needs accurate information displayed in a real-time format.
- The existing station on Cherry Street provides limited facilities for employees, such as a driver break room and bathrooms. The TC needs facilities capable of supporting CCTA's staff needs with adequate amenities.

Inability to Accommodate Ridership and Service Growth

The existing Cherry Street terminal is inadequately sized to accommodate current service demand; it is unable to accommodate expanded ridership and service growth.

- The existing facility was not designed to accommodate the current level of service and ridership. In fact, it was designed to accommodate fewer than half the routes that operated from Cherry Street on its opening day. Recent increases in energy costs and the desire to restrict the expansion of parking in the downtown area, support the need for future expansion of the terminal. Over the past ten years, CCTA ridership has grown by 63 percent. LINK regional bus service has experienced an average 40 percent annual growth in ridership over the last six years. The need for a facility that is capable of accommodating service growth is continually highlighted by the strong ridership gains.



- Recent increases in fuel costs and an expanded public awareness of environmental issues have together developed a need for the CCTA to provide potential choice riders a more efficient and comfortable transportation experience at the central passenger facility. Without providing choice riders with this more efficient and comfortable



transportation experience at a new TC, CCTA will be less effective in attracting and retaining choice riders.

- As in many cities, the City of Burlington would like to decrease auto dependence by encouraging greater use of transit to and within the urban core. The community's desire to do so increases the need for a new TC capable of meeting the riders' needs.
- The current facility is located in the most densely developed section of the central business district (CBD), with a diverse set of attractions. A new facility will need to remain in the core of downtown to address riders' requirements. In addition, many passengers transfer in the downtown to access other parts of the city. The new facility will need to maintain the ease of transfer provided by a centrally-located station and a pulse schedule.

Impact of Transit Operations on the Church Street Marketplace

Transit operations crossing Church Street create congestion problems and conflicts between pedestrians and buses, which together create one of the most important needs for a new TC.

- Currently, many of CCTA's local bus routes stop on the south side of Cherry Street, an east-west street running through Burlington's CBD. CCTA uses a pulse schedule and, as a result, buses serving each route are queued up at the same time on the south side of Cherry Street.
- Many buses must cross the Church Street Marketplace, a pedestrian-only shopping district that runs north-south for several blocks just east of the existing Cherry Street facility. The large volume of buses crossing the flow of pedestrians increases the possibility of a bus-pedestrian incident.
- Proximity to the Church Street Marketplace is very desirable for the new TC, due to the high concentration of trip ends there among current bus riders and the traveling public in general. The Marketplace itself is enhanced by reducing the number of vehicles—both buses and cars—that cross it and interrupt the free flow of pedestrians. An enhanced TC located elsewhere in the downtown area can both reduce the number of buses crossing Church Street, and make transit a more attractive option to reach downtown, thus reducing the number of cars crossing Church Street as well.

Opportunity to Improve Streetscape and Foster Private Investment to Support Continued Vibrancy of Downtown

The current location of the CCTA transit station is no longer in tune with the surrounding land use. The presence of the current transit station has an inhibiting effect on development in the immediate area. Relocating the existing transit station to a new site in downtown Burlington will serve to improve the streetscape in the Cherry Street/Church Street area and will enhance the opportunities for further investment by the private sector.

- The section of Cherry Street that contains the existing CCTA transit station has become much more of a pedestrian gateway into the Church Street Marketplace and is increasingly used as a pedestrian travel route from hotels on Battery Street.