



2021 Legislative, Policy and Advocacy Priorities

VRAN's Mission

"VRAN advocates for the modernization and revitalization of the Vermont rail network for passengers and freight, to improve the environment and to ensure the economic viability of Vermont business by providing more cost-effective transportation options."

1. Return of Amtrak – and Return Even Better

Need

AMTRAK service restored immediately before everything opens up to reassure public confidence when people begin to make bookings.

Opportunity

VRAN expects the availability and widespread administration of a COVID vaccination, will recede the virus by next summer/fall, and the likelihood of a LOT of travel demand for affordable options, including tourists and students.

The suspension of service invites a "reset" to come back better, with opportunities to fix problems of unappealing food, inconsistent and quality station oversight, minimal marketing and absence of leadership. The state can un-bundle these services, and improve them ourselves.

VRAN advocacy focus

- A. Advanced schedule and criteria for resumption of service
- B. Locally sourced Vermont food and beverages
- C. Re-imagine stations as Welcome Centers and Volunteer Station Hosts
- D. Develop a multi-layered Marketing Campaign

2. Key Infrastructure Investments

First Priority

Burlington – Essex Junction is the keystone of community rail, and links together two Amtrak routes and two freight railroads. The 10 mph line needs upgrades for higher speeds.

Other Needs

Signals on Amtrak routes would increase speeds, safety and capacity

Montpelier – Barre is an "exempted track" used for freight but valued for community rail

Amtrak to Montreal may require bridge and track upgrades

Manchester - Rutland needs welded rail for freight and future passenger

Replacement of aging Amtrak coaches

Opportunity

*VRAN expects federal economic stimulus to fund key infrastructure investments.
Vermont is revising the Rail Plan which offers planning support for federal funding.*

VRAN advocacy focus

- A. VTrans - apply for federal grants and stimulus funds
- B. Vermont Rail Plan – ensure priorities are identified in 2021 Vermont rail plan
- C. Federal Delegation – support grant applications; seek parity for rail projects and 90-10 match funding for rural rail projects; support Montreal services
- D. Public-Private Partnerships – develop funded rail investments including community rail

3. Groundwork for Future Growth

- A. Support the return of Amtrak Vermonter to Montreal
- B. Work closely with stakeholders, the legislature and VTrans to develop a governance entity with authority to bond, borrow and undertake public-private partnerships.
- C. Protect Vermont freight rail access to regional markets and the class one network. Participate in the STB process regarding rail line sales.
- D. Seek new rail freight opportunities including possible inland port

VRAN advocacy focus

- A. Serve as an information clearinghouse on governance structures, models, enabling statutes and regulations in the U.S. and elsewhere
- B. Continue legislative advocacy and education

Capacity Building Strategies

- A. Continue expanding the VRAN membership and supporter base
- B. Strengthen community engagement via regular zoom forums, guest speakers and fun post-pandemic public events (when safe)
- C. Ensure multi-generational, equity and social inclusiveness
- D. Educate and empower local advocacy leaders, decision-makers and legislators
- E. Recruit volunteers as rail ambassadors and advocacy leaders
- F. VRAN board and organizational development
- G. Coordinate with advocacy groups outside Vermont and Canada

Legislative Contacts

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