

Fayston Select Board discusses public transit

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By Kara Herlihy

Green Mountain Transit Agency (GMTA) representative Aaron Frank was present at the July 14 meeting of the Fayston Select Board to request matching funds for increased public transportation in The Valley.

The Fayston Select Board approved a motion to include the funding request in an article to be brought before the voters at Town Meeting in March 2009. Select Board members also requested that a GMTA representative be present at Town Meeting for informational purposes.

In reference to increase public transit including van pooling, Fayston Select Board member Ed Read said, "It would be nice, but it costs a lot of money to change people's habits." He continued, "People are tied to their cars, so it becomes a hard sell to people."

GMTA plans to submit a fourth CMAQ grant application to VTrans to acquire the necessary funding to move forward with a Valley commuter route. In order to apply for the CMAQ grant, GMTA needs a written commitment from one or more Valley towns to contribute the remaining 20 percent local match (\$30,000).

Frank's request follows a previous meeting between GMTA and the MRVPD Steering Committee that dealt with what GMTA director Chris Cole called the "bleak" future of public transit in The Valley.

At the last meeting of the steering committee, Cole said, "We're in a tight situation. We need to examine what we can do differently so riders can utilize the service," he continued.

The Valley Floor route currently costs \$70,000 to operate during the winter months. Cole said that GMTA is currently brainstorming ways to sustain the service year round-which may include diverting funds from the winter service and putting them towards a year-round commuter route.

Steering committee member and Warren Select Board chair Burt Bauchner said, "The world is a different place now, and we have to do something more creative here."

If the CMAQ funding is not awarded but a written commitment is provided, GMTA "will begin investigating the feasibility of diverting funding from winter service to year-round service," according to a GMTA memo from Cole. "We estimate the local funding needed to supplement existing funds used for year-round service to be approximately \$15,000," he continued.

The town of Warren approved a similar motion to include the funding request as an article to be voted on at Town Meeting.

GMTA is funded with a mix of federal, state and local money. Currently, the local funds from The Valley are being provided by Sugarbush (\$67,500), the Valley Chamber of Commerce (\$9,440), and the towns of Fayston (\$588), Waitsfield (\$923) and Warren (\$943), according to GMTA.