

SUMMARY:

There was a good turnout for this meeting, with 39 people signed in and around 50-60 in attendance, including members of the project team. Following the short presentation by Michael Allen of Behan Planning and Design, there were numerous questions about the sponsors, funding sources, and intent of the project. Several attendees noted they felt this project was aimed at “finding solutions to a non-existent problem”. In other words, they felt that the current bus station is adequate, the location is ideal, and they don’t see a need to change anything. Dennis Doyle of the Ulster County Transportation Council (UCTC) provided information on the purpose of the study in terms of looking at future options so that the community could be prepared -either to address any needs of the existing station or to look for other sites that could be advantageous in the future as well as to consider the relationship to the downtown bus station, the park and ride lots, and the other bus and UCAT stops and area destinations.

When the crowd split up into 5 smaller groups for discussion and a location-criteria ranking activity, a wide range of viewpoints began to emerge. For example, many people thought that the current station was in fact inadequate in terms of general space, layout and circulation, parking, and amenities with little to no room to accommodate any growth or expansion should transit use continue to grow. When discussed in more depth, some current issues were brought to light and future opportunities were brainstormed.

Afterwards, the small groups rejoined and had one speaker from each table discuss their main talking points and conclusions. It became evident that walkability and a central location close to both the college and the downtown area were the most important criteria in facility location to a large majority of the participants--whether maintaining the current facility and location or should a new location option become available and desirable from a long-term planning perspective. Many of these people still thought that the current location is the best. However, a number of people also wanted more free parking, amenities for commuters, safe walkways for pedestrians, and more progressive features such as electric bike facilities.

In conclusion, many of the constituents present at the meeting were residents and/or commuters who use the current bus station (or park and ride lot near the Thruway exit) and want to see it remain in its walkable downtown location. For the longer distance commuters, their needs could be summarized somewhat differently--adequate (and free) parking and express service. There were several participants that discussed the need to invest in transit now in order to promote future sustainability of the bus services and the intermodal facility itself. While many were insistent that the current location was the best, others thought that a thorough investigation of multiple locations would be most prudent. The notion of considering the community holistically emerged so that the bus/transit planning fits into the overall plan for the community. It can be summarized that people view the downtown station location as a social and economic hub for those commuting away from or entering into the Town of New Paltz.

POST-PRESENTATION DISCUSSION:

Following Michael Allen's presentation and directions for a break-out groups brainstorming activity, the meeting attendees initiated a question and answer session and general discussion. It was obvious from the numerous questions and comments that there was some anxiety and confusion about the intent and process of the proposed long-term transportation needs analysis project.

The first question was an inquiry as to who initiated the project and how it would be funded. Michael Allen and Dennis Doyle explained that the Transportation Council is the sponsor of the project but that the UCTC was not alone in initiating the effort –they gained the opinions and support of numerous other agencies and officials before collectively deciding that this was a project worth pursuing. They ensured the public that the current bus station owner had been engaged in the process, as well as representatives from the Trailways bus company and elected and non-elected officials that make up the Technical Advisory Committee. Any recommendations made by the study would be directed at all involved parties. They also explained that the project would be funded in part by the Federal Transportation Council, but that other funding sources could not be identified at this time.

Some commuters felt that their cohort may not be adequately represented in this study, as no one on the Technical Advisory Committee is specifically acknowledged as a commuter. Allen replied that the project team is certainly concerned with commuters' needs, and that this public involvement process is intentionally designed to gain input from all the different constituent groups, commuters included. He suggested they may utilize on-bus surveys, and Doyle encouraged people to reach out to him with any questions and concerns.

A few questions involved confusion over whether the goal of this project was to merge the two bus systems (UCAT and Trailways) into the same station or not. Allen clarified that neither the location nor the decision to merge systems is pre-determined. The project team has indeed identified amongst themselves some under-utilized and vacant parcels as possibilities, and is interested in the possibility of a private-public partnership, but there have been no decisions made at this time. However, these questions were purposefully left open-ended so as to let the public come up with their own opinions without being swayed by the team. He further explained that the station may expand in its current location, move somewhere more suitable, house both systems or keep them separate, and possibly involve "satellite" locations; the purpose of this study is to plan for the long-term future and see where and how any efficiencies can be gained through strategic planning.

Many attendees made clear the importance they placed on keeping the bus station in a walkable down-town location. One woman even described how her family moved to New Paltz specifically for the ability to walk to commuter buses. She exclaimed that Ulster County was a very "green" and progressive county, and to move the bus station to a non-walkable location would go against the county's principals. Allen responded saying that the team was keen on keeping the station as walkable as possible, and this is in fact a large reason for the study –to plan for the future which will likely entail even more people wanting to walk to and use a multi-modal transportation facility.

GROUP ACTIVITY:

Following the presentation and a spontaneous questions/comments session, the attendees were directed to break into five groups to have smaller discussions and to do a prepared activity involving the location of the bus station. They brainstormed the most important factors in determining where the station should be located (ie: walkable, near the college, space for parking) and then each person put 3 stickers on a chart indicating their personal 1st, 2nd, and 3rd most important factors. The following tables and summaries show each of the 5 groups' opinions as to what matters the most to them in siting a location, and what that location should include.

Table 1

Important Criteria	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Walkability	1	1	2	1	1	2			
Community Anchor	2	2	1	3	2	1			
Safety									
Sense of Community	3	2	3	3					
Taxi Service	3		3						
Jobs									
Traffic Access									
Gateway for New Paltz									

NOTES:

- Walkability/Bike/Ped
- Anchor for Community
- History – legacy
- Safety – populated area/well Lit
- Sense of Community/Familiarity
- Access for traffic
- Stormwater/environmental concerns sensitivity
- It functions well
- Convenience – close to downtown
- Gateway
- Small Businesses – anchor
- Jobs/ Employment – teller positions – have people there
- Shopping, availability of services
- Quality of life issues – safety
- Parking alternatives elsewhere

SUMMARY: Table 1 would like to keep the bus station where it is. Walkability is the most important thing. They think that the current location is safe due to plenty of “eyes on the street”. The only other possible location would be "the pit", but only in context of a bigger project.

Table 2

Important Criteria	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Parking (free)	1	1	1	2	2	3	2		
Taxi Access	L	last							
Walkability to station	1	3							
Organized Space	3	3							
Downtown location	1								
Bus access & Egress									
Easy Thruway Access	1	2	2	2					
Express Service for long distance	1								
Café/Newsstand	2	3	3	3					

NOTES:

- Parking sucks (in town) – tickets
- Getting out on Main Street
- Ridership up (need more buses) @ 6:10 am bus 20 getting on (Monday peak)
- Cabs parking in prime locations
- Walking to bus is important – that’s my biggest concern
- Free parking (pay \$1,500 a month)
- More defined bus stop – where to stand, wait – not free form as is current
- Safety arrangement
- Ideal – parking
- Walkable to downtown
- Access & egress – not sure there is a way around it
- More direct route from downtown to NYS Thruway
- Don’t want to be on bus anymore than necessary (no more extra stops)
- Thruways cannot stop and park and ride as not safe pedestrian access for Rte 32 lot

SUMMARY: Table 2 thought that free parking was the most important thing. It is also important to have easy thruway access, express services, a walkable location, and a café and newsstand.

Table 3

Important Criteria	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Safety	1	1			3		3		
Walkability	3	3	2		1	1			
Central Location		2	1	2	2	2	1		
Parking	2	2							
Public Space									
Mixed Use			3	3	3				
Retail	2	3	3						
Restrooms	1			1	1	1			
Waiting Area	2	2	1	2	2	2			
Electric Bike facilities/EV stations	3								
Taxi/drop off pick-up	3								
Pedestrian	3	1	2						
Information Kiosk	3	3							
Lockers									
Joint Public Private Use	3	2							
Public Art									

NOTES:

Features:

- Retail – Coffee Shop
- Restrooms, waiting area
- Electric bike facility storage/charge/covered
- Taxi station, dedicated drop off/pick-up area
- Pedestrian service – lighting, etc./safety
- Information kiosk
- Lockers
- Digital info – arrivals/departures/delays
- Joint public/private use
- Electric car charging facilities
- Public art

SUMMARY: Group 3 thought that the current location is good, but some other options include “the Pit” or the parcel on Henry Dubois. A central location is important, as is walkability and safety. Features should include restrooms and waiting. There was a discussion about the Park and Ride on Rt. 32 being underused.

Table 4

Important Criteria	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Walkability	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		

NOTES:

- Walkability x 7
- Sometimes parking
 - Solution:
 - Leave station where it is
 - Sell tickets @ P +R
 - Add more parking + LTP @ Thruway
- Citgo site rumor – no one wants it here
- Henry W.D. Blvd – will DOT upgrade this
 - Bypass route
- Village Hall/PIT – could utilize and bypass some of Main St. = \$\$\$
- Talk of Middle School moving, could open up lots of land. Would not want to see it leave though
- Make pull offs for UCAT busses so they don't stall/block traffic

SUMMARY: Table 4 thought that there was no problem with the current station, and that the council is looking for solutions to a nonexistent problem. However, they thought that parking could be expanded, and that there could be better routing to the Thruway. Better pull-offs for UCAT buses could help traffic issues.

Table 5

Important Criteria	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Prox to downtown	2	1	2	1	1				
Walkability	1		1	2	2				
Prox to college	2	3							
Parking availability	3								
Safe to stop									
Ability to bike/racks									
Ability to hail cabs	3								

NOTES:

- Doesn't matter (as much) where station is located for UCAT - decentralized
- Afraid the UCAT station will draw riff-raff
- Only time size of station is problem is at end of semesters – Trailways, vacations, twice per year, but also pretty bad on Fridays and Sundays
- Traffic is a larger issue – congestion regardless
- Cab rides fairly cheap in New Paltz – don't think cab parking is huge issue at station
- During peak pd have buses using public ROW
- Need to look at how New Paltz is projected to grow
- Possible interest in Car Share program – but wouldn't have to be right on site
- Discussion about safety issues at peak times due to unorganized ped/vehicular circulation
- Brief mention of bus station across Main St. from grocery store in underutilized lot

SUMMARY: Table 5 thought that walkability and proximity to downtown were the most important things. They think we need to recognize that UCAT does not need a station in the same way as Trailways does. They think that traffic congestion is the larger and inevitable problem, and that changes to the bus station will not help this. They also thought that a larger population and growth study should focus the needs of this project.

PUBLIC COMMENT CARDS:

Comment Card 1:

At the current location the site is terribly inadequate. The parking is horrible, the buses often crash into the overhang of the ticket building. The buses must also compete with traffic on Main Street. The parking lot is also used for taxis making it unbearable. The current site is in a residential area and the noise and pollution from the buses is hazardous. During snowstorms the parking lot is not plowed as well as it could be, making it slippery and dangerous for riders and pedestrians. The cabs hog the parking spots and the busses have to squeeze between them. During a holiday weekend, buses and college students spill onto the streets, clogging traffic on Main Street. The buses have a tough time turning left.

Comment Card 2:

Reasons people need parking at station:

1. Buy tickets – could clear congestion by offering online
2. To get on bus – often you can't get on at Park n Ride due to not enough buses